

Nothing Left to Lose by DefinitelyYou

Category: Stranger Things (TV 2016)

Genre: Angst, F/M, Fluff, I love the Jonathan/Nancy/Steve Friendship, Jancy, Jopper (just a bit), Mileven, Nancy's Perspective, TBH I'm not too fond of Billy, tiny bit of smut

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Characters: Billy Hargrove, Dustin Henderson, Eleven (Stranger Things), Holly Wheeler, Jim "Chief" Hopper, Jonathan Byers, Joyce Byers, Karen Wheeler, Lucas Sinclair, Maxine "Max" Mayfield, Mike Wheeler, Nancy Wheeler, Steve Harrington, Will Byers

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Summary:

Nancy and Jonathan haven't spoken since the day he walked out of their apartment four years ago—no phone calls or letters and, certainly, no awkward hellos in Hawkins. Now they've been thrown back together thanks to a family wedding. What happens when they're forced to confront the relationship, and history, they left behind?

1. Wednesday

Author's Note:

The idea for this fic came to me weeks ago, but it's taken me a long time to get all of my thoughts into a coherent narrative. In the meantime, the sheer volume of amazing Jancy stories has grown tremendously--and many of them are confronting the very same issues I've been mulling over in my head--what happens if Nancy & Jonathan break up? What about a family? I love that we are all exploring these issues and providing our own takes and these amazing characters.

I also started this just as the Jancy Fanfiction Week took off, and I couldn't break myself away from this to participate (I was already knee deep into the story). Thanks to all of the writers for some great stories--and wonderful inspiration to me as I've been working.

As always, enjoy and kudos and comments are always greatly appreciated.

She's late, as usual.

Well, only usual when it comes to her family. Nancy Wheeler is never late for shifts at the hospital or coffee with her friends or even the occasional date, but she can't seem to make it to any type of family gathering even close to on time. Her parents believe it's because she's so busy with medical school, and she plays along with them, tells them how busy she is with her residency. Sometimes they're right, but deep down, she knows that it really has more to do with the off chance of seeing her ex-boyfriend than any responsibilities med school brings.

Pushing just enough past the speed limit to make good time but not set off any of the highway patrol's speed guns—her oldest friend, Steve, now Officer Harrington, is just as free with his tips to avoid

speeding tickets as he once was with his parents liquor—she flies past the “Welcome to Hawkins” sign and cruises into her hometown, turning onto Main Street and slowing down to look for a parking spot. It’s Wednesday night, but downtown Hawkins is busier than she expected, and there are few spots available close to Duffy’s, Hawkins’ most popular bar. She curses to herself when remembers that Wednesday is trivia night at the local VFW and finally pulls into a parking space about a block away in front of The Hawk, the town’s only movie theatre. She looks up at the old marquee and groans to herself. The theatre is filled with far too many memories of high school, most having to do with that ex that she’s trying avoid, and she’d rather not face them tonight.

She sighs and pulls her make-up kit and hairbrush out of purse and hastily tries to pull herself together. Her 12-hour shift at Northwestern University’s hospital ended up growing to 16 hours, the evidence of which is clearly visible in the dark circles under her eyes and disheveled hair. She barely had enough time to catch a few hours of sleep, pack her suitcase, grab her bridesmaid dress, and hit the road in order to make the four-hour trip back to Hawkins in time for Jane’s bachelorette party.

She runs the brush threw her hair, trying to tame her shoulder-length locks and hoping that she can pull off the wavy (and not frizzy) look, blends concealer under her eyes and blush on her cheeks, and swipes her favorite gloss over her lips. Taking one last look at herself in the mirror, she hopes that her presence more than makes up for her lack of preparation for the evening. “It’s now or never, Wheeler,” she says aloud and hops out of her car, a beat up Honda Civic that looks about as good as she feels right now.

Glancing at her watch, she realizes she’s nearly an hour late for the party and takes off at a slow jog down the block to the bar. The movement wakes up her numb limbs after the four-hour drive, and the excitement of seeing her future sister-in-law, along with family and friends, finally sets in.

She’s comforted by the thought that she knows exactly what to expect when she gets to Duffy’s—the smell of stale beer and cigarettes, dim lighting made even dimmer by the cloud of smoke that perpetually hangs in the air, wood paneling, wood booths, wood everything, a

constant din of conversation that's frequently cut by peals of laughter, and a small group of friendly faces welcoming her home. When she arrives at the bar, she takes a deep breath, throws a smile on her face, and swings open the door expecting to see Jane and her mom waiting for her. Instead, she walks straight into Jonathan Byers. The ex-boyfriend she's managed to avoid for the last four years.

She looks up into his deep brown eyes, and she's immediately overwhelmed by an instinct to throw herself into his arms—the only thing that stops her from acting on it is the shocked look on his face when he finally realizes who he's walked into. Her heart is racing, and she can feel the heat rising up her neck and onto her cheeks, knowing full well that even the haziness of the bar can't hide her blush. But she can't look away from him either. After at least 10 seconds of staring at each other down, Jonathan finally breaks the silence.

"Hey," he says, quietly.

"Hey, yourself," she says in return.

Jonathan's lips curl up into a crooked smile that, at one time, was only meant for her, and her stomach flips in response. She desperately wants to remove herself from the situation, but she's frozen in place, unable to figure out what to say or where to go. She hadn't expected to see him tonight, and his presence has caught her completely off guard.

A high pitched "NANCY!" from across the room finally breaks the spell, and she turns away from him just in time to catch her soon-to-be sister-in-law, Jane, jumping into her arms.

"Nancy, you made it!" Jane squeals into her ear before letting Nancy go.

"I'm sorry I'm so late," she says. "My shift ran late and then there was traffic . . ."

"Don't apologize. You're here and that's what counts," Jane says, throwing a sash with "Bridesmaid" written on it in glitter over Nancy's head. "Now, let's go find everyone else. They can't wait to

see you.”

She turns back to where Jonathan last stood, but he’s disappeared. “Figures,” she thinks to herself as Jane drags her across the bar and into the arms of her family and friends.

Distracted by the sheer number of hellos and hugs and squeals of excitement, she doesn’t have time to process her run-in with Jonathan. The last time she saw him was when he left the apartment they shared in New York, his bag slung across his shoulder as he walked angrily out of her life. She hadn’t laid eyes on him since. It isn’t until she sees Jonathan’s mother, Joyce, that the impact of the meeting fully hits her.

“Hey, Nancy,” Joyce says, embracing in a warm hug. “It’s so good to see you.”

“It’s good to see you, too,” she says, fighting back tears that she didn’t even know she was near shedding.

“Are you okay, sweetie?” Joyce asks, stepping out of the embrace. “You look a bit rattled.”

“Yeah, yeah, I’m fine,” she says, hastily wiping her eyes. “I’m just a bit overwhelmed by everything. I can’t believe my little brother is getting married,” she lies.

“I know, it’s so exciting. Weddings always make me cry, too. Remember when Hop and I got married? I could barely say ‘I do’ I was crying so much,” Joyce says.

Nancy smiles as memories of that day come back to her. It was a simple wedding, just family and few close friends. Chief Hopper, of course, and his daughter Jane (or El as her brother, Mike, calls her), along with Jonathan and his brother, Will. The entire Wheeler family was in attendance, as was The Party—Mike’s best friends from childhood, Dustin, Lucas, and Max (or Maxine as no one calls her). Nancy and Jonathan had just graduated from high school, and the kids has just finished their freshman year; the trauma of their earlier lives (alternate dimensions and real-life monsters) behind them.

They all traveled to the courthouse in one giant group, Hopper and Joyce leading the way in his Bronco, with Will and Jane in the backseat. They were so excited to officially become siblings (step-siblings to be exact). She and Jonathan had followed behind in his beat up old Ford, holding hands and smiling all the way. Her parents and the rest made up the rear in their station wagon. Everyone was so happy that day, Joyce and the boys especially. The happiness, love, and peace they felt after years of heartbreak and trauma was contagious. The tears Joyce shed were tears of joy, and nearly everyone on the room shared them with her, even Hopper.

But what she remembers most about that day is Jonathan. They stood up with Hopper and Joyce as their witnesses, and she didn't take her eyes off of him for the entire ceremony. She had never seen him look so happy and carefree, even in their most private moments. Just after the I Dos, he turned to her with a look that spoke volumes. In that simple glance, she saw a future with him that was just as happy, just as joyful as the moment they had just witnessed. And now, here celebrating the upcoming wedding of her little brother and the first girl he ever loved, she was alone. The future she saw in Jonathan's eyes all those years ago a fleeting memory.

"Nancy, honey, are you sure you're okay?" Joyce asks again, breaking Nancy out of her memories.

"I saw Jonathan," she says bluntly. She never could stop herself from telling Joyce the truth, no matter how hard she tried not to. "Just a few minutes ago, when I arrived. I haven't seen him since New York, and he was the first person I ran into tonight," she finishes trying hard to stop new tears from falling.

"Oh, Nancy, I'm sorry. It's my fault," Joyce says, taking her hand. "He was dropping me off, and he came in to say hello to everyone. Your mom didn't think you were going to make it tonight. He wouldn't have come had he known you were here."

Nancy nodded her head in understanding. "We weren't going to be able to avoid each other much longer when our siblings are marrying each other," she laughs. "I just wasn't expecting to see him tonight. I guess I'm a bit surprised, that's all."

"I'm sure he was just as surprised as you. Maybe the hard part is over now, huh," Joyce says embracing her in another hug. "It's so good to see you."

Needing to pull herself together, Nancy heads over to the bar and orders herself a bourbon, straight up. Luckily, her bridesmaid sash gets her a drink on the house, so she orders a second one for good measure. It's going to be a long night, she can tell.

She was right about it being a long night. The girls ended up closing Duffy's, with Jane and Nancy ending the night on the bar singing "Respect Yourself" while their friends cheered them on. Everyone except her mom and Joyce ended up at Sam's Diner, Hawkins only 24-hour establishment, for a late-night (and greasy) meal. Nancy is in an intense conversation with Jane and Max about wedding hair, of all things, when they are interrupted by a loud cheer from the small group of Jane's college friends at the other end of the table. Nancy looks up and sees her brother, completely shit faced, along with Dustin, Lucas, and Will. Steve Harrington and the ex, Jonathan, trail in behind them. "Shit," she says under her breath. The bachelor party has arrived.

"Naaannccyyy!" Mike yells from across the diner and stumbles over to his big sister. She gets up to meet him, a smirk finding its way onto her face. "Hey little brother. Feeling good?"

"Great. I'm getting married to that beautiful girl right there," he says, motioning with his entire body toward Jane, who looks at him like he's hung the moon, "In like three days!"

"I know, dumb ass," Nancy says laughing.

"Aw, Nance, be nice," he says, enveloping her in big hug. He smells like beer and cigarettes (she's going to kick his ass if he's smoking now), and all she wants to do is push herself away from him. But he's still her little brother, and she returns the hug just as forcefully.

Mike swings her around, and she catches sight of Jonathan, who's staring at her from across the diner, an odd look on his face. She

catches his eye, and he turns away quickly, looking embarrassed.

“Well, well, well. If it isn’t Nancy Wheeler back in town,” Steve says breaking up the scene. “Are you going to say hello to me or what?”

Wrenching herself away from Mike and placing him in the seat next to Jane, she turns to Steve, who welcomes her in with open arms.

“How are you doing, Officer Harrington,” she says, stepping out of the hug to give him a quick salute.

“I’d be better if these assholes weren’t shit faced,” he says gesturing to the boys, who give him the finger in return, “but all in all, I’m great. You?”

“I’m good, great,” she replies, looking around the diner for Jonathan, who has somehow managed to disappear again.

“Sure you are,” Steve says, throwing his arm around her. “He’s outside smoking, Nance, so you can relax.”

“What are you talking about, Steve. I’m fine, really,” she says, her voice far more high pitched than she’d like it to be.

“Whatever you say, Dr. Wheeler,” he says, before sitting himself down at the table and stealing some of Max’s fries.

“Smoking?” she asks herself. “When did he start smoking?”

“About six months after you broke up,” she hears a soft voice respond behind her. Turning, she finds Will standing behind her with a sheepish grin on his face.

“Did I say that aloud,” she asks, blushing.

“Yeah, you did,” Will says. “It’s nice to see you, Nancy.”

“Hey, Will, it’s been too long,” she responds with a smile and reaches up to give him a hug. Will Byers is one of the sweetest people she’s ever met, and she hasn’t realized how much she’s missed him until he’s standing right in front of her. She has seen Will every now and then, when he’s been with Mike at their house, but she’s come home

less and less frequently in the last few of years. Will has always been the smallest of her brother's friends, but he must have shot up in the year or so, as she now has to stand on her tip toes to hug him. She thinks he may even be taller than Jonathan.

"Are you excited about the wedding," she asks him, "being best man and all."

"Yeah, I guess," he said smiling, looking so much like his older brother that it takes Nancy's breath away. "I'm just happy for Mike and El."

"Me, too," she says. "So what are your plans now that coll. . . " she starts but is cut off by Mike who has called proceeded to drunkenly serenade Jane and the girls with "I Can't Help Falling in Love With You" at the top of his lungs. It's awful.

"I gotta go stop this, Nancy, I'm sorry," Will says laughing.

"Duty calls," she says as she watches him try to coax her brother to eat a burger instead of singing. Everyone is laughing and chatting, and it both warms her heart and leaves her filling empty at the same time. She's missed these people, but how can she insert herself back into their lives? Does she even want to? And, as if on cue, the reason she distanced herself from Hawkins in the first place walks back inside.

She turns on her heels quickly so she doesn't have to interact with Jonathan, it's just too much for her at the moment, and goes back to her place next to Jane, kicking her brother out of the seat in the process. Mike takes a seat next to Jonathan at the opposite end of the table, grumbling all the way. She rejoins the conversation, which has now turned to the sharing of favorite high school memories.

She tries to ignore whatever is happening at other end of the table, but she can't help but watch Jonathan from the corner of her eye, trying to be discrete, though she imagines she's anything but. He looks good. Really good. He's still the same Jonathan—his hair is shorter than she's ever seen it (all of the length now in the front, the back close cropped) and he's filled out a bit, but he's still as lanky as ever. There is something different about him, though. He's in his

normal place at the edge of the group, quietly watching and chiming in with a remark every now and then, but there's an ease about him that wasn't there before. More confidence, maybe? She can't quite place it, but it's working for him, and she's growing more and more pissed off at herself for still being so attracted to him. Plus, aside from that one look when he first arrived, he's acting like everything's normal, when it clearly isn't. She honestly wants him to be happy, but, dammit, she also wants him to look like this reunion is affecting him as much as her. She wishes that the bourbon she downed at Duffy's was still working its magic.

After the majority of the food has been eaten and the buzzes have worn off, the group starts to leave a few at a time, starting with Dustin and Lucas, who take Max and the other girls home. Aside from Steve, it's now just the Wheeler and Byers-Hopper siblings left at the table. Jane moves down the table to sit next to Mike, tucking herself into his side. Nancy reluctantly scoots down the table to join the group, avoiding Jonathan's eye as she settles in.

"So, where did you guys go for the big bachelor party tonight?" she asks, trying to start the conversation flowing again.

"Your basement. Didn't you know?" Steve says.

"Nope. I was so late tonight, I haven't even made it home yet" she says.

"Yeah, Lucas planned this epic D & D adventure for us," Will chimes in. "Dustin provided the snacks, Steve provided the alcohol, and Jonathan the soundtrack."

"It was awesome," Mike says with a yawn. "One of our best adventures yet."

"Did you two join in the fun," Nancy says gesturing between Jonathan and Steve.

"We watched and provided color commentary," Jonathan says, smiling over at Steve.

"What Byers is trying to say is that we made fun of them mercilessly

while we drank beer,” Steve adds.

“So just like old times, huh,” she quips.

Steve nods his head and smiles up at her. Jonathan mutters a quiet “yeah” and fiddles with a straw on the table. Will starts to recap for Jane a particularly exciting moment in the adventure involving a Thessalhydra and a wayward princess while Mike nods off besides them. Steve excuses himself to “take a piss,” leaving Jonathan and Nancy in an uncomfortable silence. It’s Jonathan who breaks the ice.

“How’s Chicago?” he asks, not looking up from the straw.

“It’s, um, good,” she says. “I don’t get to see much of it now that I’m in my residency, but I really love the city.”

“Yeah?” he asks, finally looking up. She nods.

“How’s New York,” she asks him after a moment.

“It’s good,” he says with a slight smile.

“You’re still at *The Village Voice*, right?” she asks again.

“Yeah. I was just promoted to photo editor.”

“That’s great, Jonathan,” she says sincerely. “Really great.”

“Well, it looks good on my resume, but it’s less time in the field. I prefer to be behind the lens as much as possible,” he says.

“I know,” she responds.

“Yeah. You do,” he says softly. Nancy winces at his response, surprised by how much emotion lies behind those three words. They sit in silence for another minute or two, until Steve joins them again.

“So are we talking?” he asks, looking between the two of them.

“Yes, Steve, we’re talking. Happy now?” Nancy responds, the sarcasm more heavy than she intended it to be.

“Hey, don’t be a jerk, Wheeler,” he says, clearly annoyed. “Do you

have any idea how hard it is to try and navigate between the two of you? Can you just get over yourselves and let us all enjoy the weekend?"

Steve was right. She and Jonathan had done a complicated dance for years, one that involved planning and logistics on everyone's part. Nancy coming in to town after Jonathan had left, heading home for holidays only if he wasn't going to be there, and so on. It had worked until the inevitable happened—Mike and Jane deciding to get married. Nancy thought she had more time, didn't expect them to get married so soon after college, but Mike had gotten into engineering graduate school at Purdue, and Jane wasn't going to let him out of her sight. And so, here she is, finally confronting her past. No more retreating, she thinks to herself as she glances at Jonathan across the table.

"I'm sorry, Steve," she says. "I'll try."

"Yeah, me too," Jonathan says, finally looking up from the straw he'd been fiddling with.

"Thank you," Steve says. "Now that that's settled, I've got an early shift tomorrow, so I'm heading out. You all have rides home?"

The five remaining partiers all nod in response.

"Good. See you kids tomorrow," Steve says and heads out the door.

"So when did Steve turn into a mini-Hopper?" Nancy asks, grinning.

"The minute he put on that damn police hat," Mike says before laying his forehead on the table. She'll have to make sure she gets some water and ibuprofen in him before he passes out at home.

"Tell us about med school, Nancy," Wills says, turning to her. "What's your specialty?"

"I don't really have one yet," she says. "I'm on rotation in the ER right now, which I thought I'd like, but I hate. I'm actually leaning toward pathology."

"Pathology?" asks Jane.

"Yeah, the study of the causes and effects of diseases. I really love it," she says.

"Makes sense," Jonathan pipes in. "You always loved solving mysteries."

"I never thought of it like that," she says, "but you're right. I do like a challenge."

Jonathan smiles and looks back down at the straw that's now twisted into a tight knot. Nancy wonders if the straw is any indication of how he's feeling. She selfishly hopes it is.

The four of them continue to chat, while Mike dozes, head nestled in his arms on the table. They talk about plans after college and little wedding details, like where they're going to sit Nancy's Aunt Mabel who no one in the family likes. And it feels good, natural. And then Jane drops a huge bomb into the conversation, asking Nancy if she's seeing anyone. Jonathan chokes on the sip of coffee he'd just taken, and Nancy drops the glass she was holding, spilling water all over the table.

"Um, no, not right now," she responds, avoiding Jonathan's eye and sopping up the water with her napkin. She glares at Jane, who returns her glare with a smile and asks yet another question.

"Weren't you pretty serious with that guy, what's his name . . ."

"Nathan," Mike chimes in without raising his head from its spot on the table.

"Yeah, I was, but it didn't work out," Nancy answers tersely.

"Sorry to hear that. He was cute," Jane says and then, turning to Jonathan, asks "And you, Jonathan? Still seeing Anna? I haven't heard you mention her much lately?"

Nancy immediately looks over at him to gauge his response. No one told her that he was dating anyone. Not that it was her right to know."

"Um, we broke up last month," he says, refusing to look up from the

coffee mug that he's gripping so tightly that his knuckles have turned white.

"Wait, you did?" Will asks. "How come I didn't know? Is that why she isn't here this weekend?"

"I haven't had a chance to tell anyone yet, Will. Mom doesn't even know," Jonathan answers, somewhat annoyed. "I think we've all had other things on our mind."

Silence follows. Jonathan is clearly uncomfortable, and Nancy is feeling more so as the minutes pass. Will, always sensitive to other's feelings, quickly changes the subject. "We should probably get Mike home, huh?"

"Yeah. My mom will be so mad if he spends tomorrow hung over in bed, especially since we have family arriving," she says starting to get up.

"I'll help you get him to the car," Jonathan says, getting up along with her.

"Shit," she says suddenly. "My car is still over in front of The Hawk. Max gave me a ride to the diner."

"We can give you a ride to your car and then follow you home. I don't think you're going to be able to get him in the house yourself," Will says.

"Thanks," she says relieved. "I appreciate it." And she does, even though she'd rather not be in Jonathan's presence any longer than necessary.

With a little help from Jane, who discretely manages to lift Mike out of his chair and onto Jonathan's shoulder (after all these years, Nancy is still amazed by Jane's powers), they get Mike settled into the backseat of Jonathan's car, head on Jane's lap. Nancy goes to join Jane in the backseat, but Will slips in before she can get to the door. Resigned, she slides into the passenger seat of Jonathan's beat up old Ford, and she feels as if she's been transported back in time.

"I can't believe this is still running," she says, patting the dash. God,

the hours she's spent in this car. She blushes to think about how many times they had sex in the backseat where her brother and his fiancé and best friend now sit.

"Me either," he says, laughing. "Hopper keeps it running, for old time's sake, I guess. It's always here for me when I get home."

They drive in silence for the five minutes it takes to get to her car. She hops out and follows Jonathan back to the familiar cul-de-sac of her youth. It takes all four of them to get Mike into his bedroom and settled in bed. They barely manage to make it back out of the house before breaking into peals of laughter.

Needing to get her bags out of the car, Nancy follows them out to the driveway.

"Thanks, again," she calls over to Jonathan, Will, and Jane as they head for the Ford.

"Sure thing," Will calls back and takes her spot in the passenger seat. Jane turns and waves to Nancy before diving into the backseat, the door magically slamming shut behind her.

Nancy looks over to Jonathan, who is standing at the driver's side door watching her, with a look she can't quite place on his face. "It's nice to see you, Nancy," he finally says.

"You, too," she responds. And she's surprised to find that she really means it.

As she slips back into the house and up to her old room, she's overcome by a wave of loneliness so strong that it takes her breath away. "Shit," she thinks to herself. This weekend is going to be harder than she original thought.

2. Thursday

Notes for the Chapter:

I have to admit that I had a goofy idea in my mind that I indulged in this chapter--it mainly stems from the fact that Billy is my least favorite character on the show, and I wanted to present a different picture of him. So if it doesn't quite work, thanks for sticking with me and indulging my flight of fancy. I do think there's plenty of other content to make up for it.

And just a quick warning--there is mention of pregnancy loss in this chapter.

Nancy wakes up to the smell of coffee and the sound of breakfast being made in the kitchen, along her little sister's laughter. She'd love to join her family downstairs, but she slept terribly and is fighting a killer headache that she doubts is the result of a hangover. No matter how hard she tried, she couldn't get Jonathan out of her mind all night long. She went over every single interaction they had the night before, trying to figure out what he was thinking and feeling or, most important, what she's feeling and thinking. As if that wasn't enough emotional turmoil, she had to rehash their break-up for the thousandth time.

She and Jonathan had never discussed what happened, not once in the four years since they've been apart. They haven't spoken since the day he left their apartment—no phone calls or letters and, certainly, no awkward hellos in Hawkins—until last night. To be fair, he had tried to contact to her, multiple times, but she wouldn't—couldn't—speak to him. She cut him out of her life the minute he walked out the door.

In all honesty, they didn't necessarily break up as much as their relationship just ended. They had been together for nearly six years, four of which they spent in New York City—she studied pre-med at Columbia, he photography at NYU. They both had graduated at the top of their class, and they both had opportunities they couldn't pass up: she a full-ride to Northwestern Medical School back in the

Midwest, he a photography internship with *The Washington Post* in D.C. She doesn't know if it was pride or stubbornness or simply the desire to spend some time on their own, but neither one of them were willing to sacrifice their plans for the other, despite how much they loved each other or their shared history.

The day Jonathan left for D.C. they had gotten into a terrible fight over their apartment. Nancy had wanted to break their lease, and he refused on the basis that he wouldn't be in D.C. forever. He wanted a familiar place to return to, and she couldn't understand why he just wouldn't join her in Chicago. It was a stupid fight, one that was based more on their fear of the unknown than any fault in the other, but it was the worst one they'd ever had. Her last words to him had been to call him a coward, accuse him of being too scared to take a chance on their relationship just when it got complicated. Jonathan didn't respond—he didn't need to, she could see the hurt he felt in his eyes, followed by silent fury. He walked out without saying another word.

Instead of admitting how much his leaving had hurt her or trying to reach out to him. She told herself it was for the best. Really. It wasn't fair to either of them to manage a long-distance relationship with no end in sight. She doesn't regret her decision (what good would that do anyway), but seeing him last night had brought up feelings that she buried years ago. And this time, there wasn't a clear retreat in sight. Mike and Jane were getting married on Saturday. She was a bridesmaid, he the photographer. They had a rehearsal dinner, ceremony, reception, and brunch to get through before she left for home on Sunday. How the hell is she going make it through the weekend?

Despite her headache, Nancy can't bear to spend any more time alone with her thoughts, so she gets herself up, grabs some ibuprofen from the medicine cabinet in the bathroom, and heads downstairs to greet her family.

Nancy winces as she turns the corner into the kitchen and Holly meets her with an ear-piercing scream. Nancy loves her little sister dearly, but, at that moment, she really didn't like her that much.

"Hey Holly," she says quietly, trying to adjust to the light and the

sounds of the busy kitchen.

“Nancy, I’m so happy you’re finally home,” Holly says and wraps her arms around her big sister’s waist, even though she’s almost taller than Nancy now.

“I’m happy to be home. Morning, mom.”

“Good morning,” Karen says with a big smile. “How are you feeling this morning?” she asks with a wink.

“I’ve got a headache, which I don’t think is from the party last night,” she says before her mother can cut her off. “I didn’t sleep very well.”

“Was it seeing Jonathan?” her mom asks, a look of concern and understanding on her face.

“How did you know I saw him?” Nancy asks in return.

“Joyce told me you bumped into him at the start of the party, and Mike told me that he helped you get home last night,” her mom says.

“Wait, Mike’s up already?” she asks.

Karen nods, adding, “Jane came to get him around 8 so that they could run a few final errands. He didn’t look too happy about it. Anyway, about Jonathan?”

“Oh, um, yeah, I saw him briefly at the bar and then later at the diner,” Nancy says.

“Did you talk? Or just stare at each other awkwardly?”

“Mom, come on,” Nancy says feeling like a teenager all over again. “We talked, and, yes, it was awkward.”

“And?” Karen asks.

“And what?”

“How do you feel? This was a big step for you two.”

“I don’t know, it was nice to actually see him, to hear how he’s doing.

But it's still just weird."

"I know, sweetie," her mom says, wrapping a comforting arm around her shoulder. "He looks good, though, don't you think?"

"Mom," Nancy snaps, swatting her arm away. "Come on."

"I'm serious, Nance," Karen says. "New York has been good to him. But . . ."

"But what?"

"Joyce says he seems lonely," Karen says turning to her.

"Well, mom, that's not my problem. He's the one who walked out on me," Nancy says, her defenses getting the best of her.

"Okay, okay, Nancy, truce. Do you think you can spend a good part of the weekend with him? He will officially be part of the family now."

"Yes, mom, I think I can handle it," she says and storms back up the stairs to her room, burying herself under her covers and willing herself to fall back to sleep if only to avoid having to deal with her mother anymore today.

The ringing of the telephone wakes Nancy out of a deep sleep. At first she thinks it's the family phone, but she soon realizes it's her personal line that's woken her up—she had no idea her parents had held onto that line. She looks over at the clock, and it says 4:30. Shit, she slept the entire day away. Thankfully, she wasn't needed for any wedding related events today. The phone rings again, and she untangles herself from her covers to pick it up.

"Hello," she says groggily.

"Nancy?" asks the familiar voice on the other line.

"Steve?" she asks in return.

“Yeah, it’s me,” he says cockily. “Are you still in bed?”

“My mom was driving me insane, so I decided to camp out in my room.”

“Well, I’ve got an even better solution for insane mothers,” he says far too loudly. “Pull yourself together and meet me down at the station, okay?”

“What?”

“Just meet me down at the station, Nance, please. And dress for monster hunting.”

“Wait, Steve. What’s going on? Is everything okay? Is it Jane? Or Will?”

“Whoa, whoa, Nance. Everything is fine. Seriously. I just need a little help with a side project that’s all. Nothing serious and nothing dangerous, I promise.”

“Don’t scare me like that Harrington, okay?”

“So are you coming or not?”

“Yes. Give me 10,” she says before hanging up. Monster hunting? My god, it’s been years since she had heard or uttered the term “monster hunting,” and it still brings a shiver to her spine to think about their adventures as teenagers. She can’t even begin to imagine what Steve has planned, but she knows Jonathan must be involved as well—there’s no monster hunting party without him. She sighs and wills herself out of bed to find her old beat-up jeans and corduroy jacket.

By the time she reaches the station, Jonathan is already there. He’s leaning against the side of his car finishing up a cigarette. He’s wearing his standard black jeans and black denim jacket over an REM concert t-shirt. He’s also wearing a pair of white converse that she swears must still be his original pair from high school judging by the looks of them. The whole scene is far too familiar to her (aside from the smoking), and she doesn’t appreciate the way her heart races and her palms sweat just by looking at him.

By the time she parks her car next to the old Ford, Steve has already made his way to her car door and opens it for her.

“Looking good, Wheeler,” he says with a whistle.

“You’re an idiot, Harrington,” she says with a smirk as she gets out of the car.

“Hey, that’s Officer Harrington to you,” he says feigning anger. After a beat or two, they both laugh at the ridiculous banter, and Nancy feels a bit more under control than she did moments ago.

“So can you explain what’s going on Steve?” Jonathan asks as he walks over to them. He doesn’t look too happy to see either of them. “I’m missing dinner for this.”

“Is your mom cooking?” Steve asks. Jonathan nods. “Well, this will be better, I promise.”

Before Jonathan can protest, Steve explains the situation. Max called him today and let him know that Billy showed up unexpectedly and is being a total asshole, big surprise. She has no idea why he’s here, but she thinks he’s going to be his typical dick self—her words, not mine, Steve clarifies—and will try to disrupt the weekend in some way. So, Steve wants to pay him a visit.

“What do you mean a visit?” Jonathan asks.

“Well, I think that we three monster hunters need to drop by the house, remind him why he was so freaked out by us all those years ago,” Steve says.

“He wasn’t freaked out by us, Steve,” Nancy says. “He still gave you shit at school, and he never even acknowledged Jonathan and me.”

“Yeah, but he also knew that I carried that damn bat around with me in my car. He’d talk a good game, but he never came near me again. Plus Byers can look like crazy mother when he wants to. Billy knew better than to mess with any of us,” he adds. Nancy just shakes her head in response.

“What do you have in mind? Want me to intimidate him with my

fancy camera?” Jonathan asks, his tone laced with sarcasm.

Nancy snorts, loudly. Jonathan’s dry, sarcastic sense of humor was one of her favorite things about him, and she responded to his comment without even thinking. It’s just, so, Jonathan.

“Are you done now, Wheeler?” Steve says clearly annoyed.

“Yes, sorry,” she says and glances up at Jonathan, who’s looking down at her with an expression that shuts her up immediately.

“Okay. Let’s all grab some props, hop into my car, and stop by the house. You know, just to say hi, for old time’s sake,” Steve says, winking.

Steve pops his trunk, and Nancy is immediately transported into her past. There’s the infamous bat that Jonathan made into a deadly weapon thanks to a dozen or more nails, a handgun and bullets in a small box, along with a can of gasoline, two bear traps, and other odds and ends.

“Jesus, Steve, isn’t this illegal?” Nancy exclaims.

“Well, yes, and no. I have a license for that gun, but the rest, well, let’s say I’m into hunting.”

“Have you been going through our back shed,” Jonathan asks picking up the bear trap that he and Nancy bought years ago to fight a faceless monster.

“Hopper cleaned the shed a few years ago and offered them to me. I figured someone needed to keep all this shit together just in case,” Steve responds.

“Just in case of what, Steve? Has something happened? I thought everything settled down once the lab was closed,” Nancy says, trailing her hand over the deadly odds and ends in the trunk.

“No, it’s been quiet. It’s just, I don’t know, I feel better knowing this is here in case we ever need it again,” he says shrugging.

“I think the bat is yours, Harrington. Nance, you take the gun. I’ll

stick to my Zippo lighter,” Jonathan says handing the gun to Nancy.

Nancy winces slightly at hearing him use her old nickname. She quickly grabs the gun and checks her aim to distract herself and hopes he didn’t notice her reaction.

“Are you sure you don’t want a gun or something intimidating, Byers?” Steve asks.

“Nope. I’m great a shooting pictures, but Nance has always been the one with the killer aim,” he says coldly and hops into the backseat of the car before anyone can respond. He immediately rolls down the window and lights another cigarette.

Nancy hops into the front seat with Steve and glances back at Jonathan. She feels prickly after his last statement, so she takes the cheapest shot she can think of in the moment. “That’s a terrible habit, you know,” Nancy says as she buckles her seatbelt.

“I know,” he says and catches her eye as he takes another drag. The look he gives her, his entire demeanor, can only be described as defiant, like he’s willing her to say something else. This Jonathan, closed off, aloof, is the one she last saw in New York, and she almost feels relieved to see him again. The niceties, smiles were all show, she knew it. She’s not sure what brought him out now, but this version of Jonathan she can handle. She flashes him one of her biggest smiles just for spite. He doesn’t react, simply turns his head and blows smoke out of the window.

“Okay, here’s what we’re gonna do,” Steve says breaking the tension in the car as they pull out of the station.

“This is such bullshit, Steve,” Nancy says. She feels ridiculous as she tries to look intimidating, the gun visibly tucked into the waist of her jeans as she leans back on the side of Steve’s car. They are parked on the side of the road outside of the Hargrove house waiting for Billy or Max—or both—to appear.

“Just hang on, it’s going to be great,” Steve says from his spot by the

trunk of his car, the infamous bat swung casually across his shoulder.

Jonathan continues to glower by Nancy's side, flicking the Zippo lighter on an off, on and off. She can feel the tension rolling off of him in waves, and it's starting to annoy her. Why now? It was awkward last night, but not angry. What changed?

Another 5 minutes pass, and Jonathan suddenly erupts, "Jesus, Steve, can we just go. I feel ridiculous."

And just as Jonathan starts to walk back to the passenger side of the car, Billy Hargrove slams the screen door to his house and stomps down the front stairs. He stops dead in his tracks once he sees the three of them.

"Well, howdy stranger," Steve says in his most cocky voice. "Long time no see."

Nancy looks Billy up and down. All the girls at Hawkins High swooned over him, but she never understood his appeal. The mullet, the earring, the smarmy smile. She's pleased to see that time hasn't been too good to him—he still sports his mullet, but his hair is a lot thinner now. And his once toned abs are flabby, a belly hanging over the belt of his jeans. He still wears his shirt open one button too far, which does nothing to hide his aging physique. She smiles thinking about what Carol may have to say if she saw him now.

"Oh, right, it's Officer Harrington now," Billy finally says. "Have you finally learned to stand your ground? Or do you simply hide behind that asshole chief. What's his name, Hopper? What a joke."

At the mention of the Hopper, Jonathan turns, focusing all of his current frustration on Billy, who takes a step back when he notices Jonathan, who has now moved back to Nancy's side. He takes a step in front of her just like he used to do whenever he thought she was being threatened. She can't see his face, but she can imagine the steely gaze that he must be wearing. She shivers in response, remembering what it felt like to be on the receiving end of his ire.

"I'm glad to know you're still such a charmer, Billy," Steve replies. "We're here to pick up Max. I assume you've seen her. Or has that

cloud of cologne that follows you around distorted your vision.”

Billy doesn't answer, taking in the scene in front of him instead—Steve sporting a shit-eating grin with the spiked bat, Nancy smirking disdainfully with a gun at her side, and Jonathan glaring, opening and closing his Zippo to a menacing beat. Monster hunters at the ready.

Billy's cockiness fades away, replaced by a momentarily flash of confusion and then what Nancy thinks must be fear. Billy is about to say something but is cut off by Max, who runs out the front door and past her step brother. “See ya, loser,” she says, flipping her flame-red hair (and the bird) as she passes him. After she hops in the front of Steve's car, Billy regains some semblance of control, mutters “fuck off” under his breath and stomps to his car, the same old black Camaro he had in high school. It looks just as good as he does.

The three of them don't move as they watch him hurry to his car and speed off, gravel flying. Once the car is out of sight, they break into peals of laughter. Well, everyone except Jonathan, who lights another cigarette before shoving the Zippo back into his pocket and slipping back into the car. After returning her weapon to the trunk, Nancy reluctantly joins Jonathan in the back.

“That was awesome,” Max says from the front. “I haven't seen him look so scared in years.” And she starts to laugh again, and Nancy can't help but join in.

“See, I told you it'd be worth it,” Steve says and flashes Max the signature Steve Harrington grin. “Somethings definitely going on with them,” Nancy thinks to herself.

“Jonathan, I don't think I've ever seen you look that angry before,” Max says. “I was even freaked out by you.”

“Yeah, well, I don't like it when people mess with my family,” he says quietly, not joining in the merriment.

Nancy looks over at him, but he refuses to catch her eye, looking out the window instead. A sharp pain lances itself through her heart as it hits her that she's no longer included in that statement. When she

first met him, his family was small, only Will and Joyce (not even Lonnie, his asshole of a dad, was included), but she soon worked her way into that small group, followed by Hopper and Jane. And once you made your way into his heart, well, there was nothing he wouldn't do for you. She forgot how much that meant to her and how much it actually hurts to be excluded from that group.

"Steve, where are we going?" she asks once she notices that they aren't heading back to the station.

"I'm dropping Max at Dustin's house," he responds.

"Yeah, the old party is getting together tonight, just the six of us," she says.

"Including Will?" Jonathan asks.

"Yeah, yeah, I think so," she says.

"Shit," Jonathan says under his breath.

"What's wrong?" Nancy asks.

"I had just hoped to see him tonight. That's all," he said still refusing to meet her eye.

"Byers, why don't you head back to Duffy's with me and Nancy. I think we could all use a beer after our shenanigans," Steve says, catching Jonathan's eye in the rearview mirror.

He's quiet for a minute or more. Nancy can tell he's mulling over his options—hang out with his mom and Hopper or go to the bar with Nancy and Steve. He eventually responds with a "Why not," showing as little emotion as possible.

"Great. To Duffy's we go."

"Steve, be honest with me. Why did we just do that? I just don't buy the fact that you think Billy would have made a scene at the wedding," Nancy asks. She and her fellow monster hunters are sitting

at a booth at Duffy's sharing a pitcher of beer. Jonathan is tucked into the corner of the booth across from Nancy, glowering.

"Nah, I really just wanted to see the look on his face. It was pretty awesome, wasn't it?"

"Yeah, it was, but I think there's more to it," she says, narrowing her eyes at him. He raises his eyebrows at her, and she continues. "I think you're either dating or want to date Max. And I think you wanted to show off for her, by reminding Billy of what went down all those years ago."

She tips her beer at him before taking a sip of the cool liquid, wincing at the taste. "Did you by the cheapest beer in the house?" she asks him accusingly.

"So, let me sort through those accusations, Wheeler. Yes, I bought Coors Light. I like it, and it does the trick. And, yes, Max and I are more than friends, just since she's been back from college, but I have no idea how you figured that out. We haven't told anyone yet. Or at least I haven't. And, no, I didn't want to show off for her," he says with a big sigh. "She really did call me. Billy's been in and out of jail, and she doesn't like it when he's home. With everything going on this weekend, she wanted to send him a message to leave us all well alone. Happy now?"

She nods and taps her mug to his. "Thanks for the honesty."

"How'd you guess about me and Max?"

"I don't know, just something about the way you looked at her. There was a spark there, I can't explain it."

"You've always been good at reading people, Nance, so maybe you can tell me why Byers here is in such a shitty mood."

Jonathan flips Steve the bird from his spot in the corner.

"I've no idea, Steve, let's ask him," she says and turns looks him straight in the eye, eyebrows raised in question.

He looks between Nancy and Steve for a moment, his annoyance

clearly evident, but he finally breaks, “Will and I got in a big fight right before you called, and I had hoped that we could resolve it tonight.”

“What about?” Steve asks.

“Lots of things, but mainly the fact that I haven’t called in a while. He’s pissed off I didn’t tell him about breaking up with Anna, thinks I’m hiding things from him,” he responds. Nancy looks away from him at the mention of his ex-girlfriend, focusing on her beer instead.

“Are you?” Steve asks.

“Yes and no,” he says sitting up and running his fingers through hair. “I hadn’t told anyone about Anna yet. Anyway, the fight put me in a bad mood, and I couldn’t shake it. I thought going out with you would help, but it didn’t. Too many memories or something. Sorry.”

“No apologies necessary, man. I’m glad you came out with us all the same,” Steve says.

Jonathan nods and gives Steve a small smile. They sit in comfortable silence for a bit, and Nancy can’t help but drudge through old memories as well. She shudders as chill runs through her body thinking of faceless monsters and other dimensions.

“Are you cold?” Jonathan asks her. “You can take my jacket,” he says starting to shrug off his denim jacket. It’s the nicest gesture he’s made to her all night.

“No, thanks though,” she answers. “I was just thinking about those memories you mentioned. Do you think it’s really over? I know it’s been years since our last run in with the Upside Down, but it just doesn’t feel over to me. I can’t explain it.”

“Nancy, like I told you, nothing has happened in years,” Steve says.

“I get it,” Jonathan says, finally pulling himself out of the corner. “I hear things every now and then in my work for the paper, things that just don’t seem right. Someone who’s disappears suddenly, talk of flashing lights at a murder scene. I’ve tried to volunteer to go out on location for those shoots, but my editor never sent me, said I needed

to stick to my beat. I've often thought of going on my own, but, I don't know, it didn't feel right to go by myself," he ends, catching her eye.

"I've seen things, too," Nancy adds, picking up where Jonathan left off. "I get to see so many weird injuries during by ER rotation, strange bites and respiratory infections. If I'm lucky enough to see those cases, I always try to ask a few extra questions, ask for more details about the animal or if they've seen any strange things in the air, things like that. But my colleagues started to look at my oddly, so I had to back off. But I do wonder."

"Well, while you two keep wondering, I'm going to go take a piss," Steve says as he gets up, leaving Jonathan and Nancy alone for the first time. They sit in silence, neither one looking at the other. After a minute to two, Nancy finally breaks the ice.

"So this argument with Will. It must be bad, huh?" she asks.

"I don't know. I really haven't been in touch much lately, and I think the whole Anna situation just makes his assumption even stronger."

"Was he particularly close to her?" Why she's allowing herself to go down this line of questioning is beyond her, but she has to admit that she's curious.

"He liked her, but he wasn't close to her. I think it's the fact that I've kept to myself more lately. I was, am, still processing things, trying to figure it all out. I wanted to do that on my own before talking to anyone else."

"Jonathan, didn't you learn years ago that you don't have to handle things on your own?"

"Nancy, it's really fucking weird to be having this conversation with you."

"No shit," she says, causing them both to laugh and breaking the last bit of tension that surrounded them.

The rest of the night goes smoothly as the three of them reminisce and learn all about Steve's adventures on the Hawkins police force.

They expertly manage to avoid any talk of Nancy's or Jonathan's current love life or other personal details. After a few hours of chatting, Steve heads to the bar to settle their bill, and Jonathan heads outside for a cigarette. Nancy watches him leave and wonders what's really going on with him. He and Will hardly ever fight, and she knows it must really be bothering him. She looks for Steve and sees him engrossed in a conversation with some locals at the bar, so she decides to follow her curiosity and join Jonathan outside. She finds him sitting on top of one of the picnic tables on the bar's patio, which is surprisingly empty for this time of the year, smoking.

"That's a terrible habit," she says, sitting next to him.

"So you've told me," he replies.

"Why did you start? I thought you never wanted to smoke," she says.

"Never say never, huh," he says with a smirk. "I don't know. Lots of people smoke at the Voice, and I just picked it up. I've tried to quit once or twice, but it never sticks."

"Well, try again, okay?" she says bumping her knee into his. He responds by mimicking her gesture, and she warms at his touch.

"So, can you tell me what happened with Anna? I know, I know, it's weird, I get it," she says as he tries to cut her off, "but you look really upset, Jonathan, and maybe talking will help."

He's silent so long that she thinks he's angry with her, but he suddenly lets out a long sigh and starts. "We were together a little over a year. She was, or is, a curator at a gallery in SoHo, and she worked on a showing of my photos . . .

"You had a gallery showing? Really?" she asks excitedly.

"Yeah, it was my third one actually," he says, suddenly shy. He always hated bragging about himself or his work. It's one of his more endearing qualities.

"Jonathan, that's amazing," she says reaching over instinctively to squeeze his hand. Before she reaches him, she quickly comes to her senses and stops herself at the last minute, awkwardly reaching down

to scratch her ankle instead.

“Anyway, we started dating shortly after, and it was good. And then about a month ago, I applied for a new job outside of New York. When I told her about it, she got really upset.”

“Why?”

“Well, it’s not in New York most importantly. And I get it—she spent years trying to establish herself in the art world. It would be hard to start over.”

“And?”

“And, uh, the job was in Chicago.”

“Chicago has a great art scene. I bet she could make connections easily . . . ,” she trails off as the reality of the situation hits her.

“Yeah.”

“Does she know about me?”

“Of course. I wouldn’t be with someone seriously without mentioning you. You were too big a part of my life to just pretend like it didn’t happen,” he says, clearly annoyed.

“So why Chicago?” she asks quietly, trying not to annoy him any more.

“The job is photo editor for the features section at the *Chicago Tribune* . . . “

“Wow,” she interrupts.

“Yeah, I know, they approached me after seeing my work in New York. Pretty big deal. And it’s closer to home. I miss my family, I miss Will. I don’t think he’s ever going to leave the Midwest, and if I can still be in a city and be close to him, how can I pass up that chance?”

“I understand,” she says. “It’s one of the reasons I like Chicago so much. I’m a world away from Hawkins, but I can be home in less

than five hours.”

“Exactly. But I think Anna hated the idea of the Midwest more than she valued our relationship. And here we are.”

“Jonathan, come on. You don’t give a year of your life to someone and then just walk away from it.” The minute the words are out of her mouth, she regrets them. They were together 6 years, and she cut him out of her life. What the hell was she thinking? “Oh god, I’m so sorry.”

He doesn’t say anything but grabs the pack of Marlboros out of his pocket. As he lights up, he says to her, cigarette in his mouth, “Now can you guess why I smoke?”

She guffaws at that. “Glad to know you’re still such a smart ass, Byers.”

“I aim to please,” he says, flipping his lighter closed with an ease that demonstrates the frequency of the gesture. She can’t help but admit that it’s ridiculously sexy and closes her eyes to try to recover her senses.

“And you? What about this Nathan fellow Mike mentioned?” he asks, changing the subject.

“There’s nothing to tell. I went on a few dates with him. One just happened to coincide when Mike and Jane came to the city, so they met him. It didn’t last long after that.”

“What happened?”

“Not much, really. We just didn’t really connect, plus I’m busy with med school. I don’t have much time for anything else besides that.”

“Bullshit.”

“What?”

“Bullshit. Don’t use med school as an excuse, Nance. You could always find time for anyone you cared about.”

"How can you say that? We didn't see each other at all that last year in New York," and there they are, back to where she hoped she would never go again. "Dammit," she curses to herself.

"That's because I was busy with my senior show, and you were studying and applying for med school. We still came home to each other every night."

"And then passed out from exhaustion. Come on, Jonathan"

"You didn't answer my question, Nancy," he interrupts her.

"What question?"

"Why things didn't work with Nathan."

"I don't know, okay," she says, her frustration getting the best of her. "Things just weren't right. Things just weren't right with anyone after . . . fuck it, after you." And there it was.

He doesn't respond, simply finishes his cigarette in silence. She has no idea what to say. She's embarrassed and essentially admitted that their relationship isn't quite as cut and dry as she presents it to everyone, even herself.

She decides it's best for her to leave and starts to get up when he says, quietly, "I'll show you mine if you show me yours."

She stops in her tracks and sits back down. She flips over her left hand and places it on her thigh. The long jagged scar from a terrifying night years ago has faded, but it still clearly divides her palm in two. Before Jonathan and after Jonathan, she often thinks.

Jonathan reaches over and places his left hand next to hers, his matching scar lining up perfectly with hers, visible proof of the connection that they forged years ago. Or shared trauma, as someone once told them. She reaches with her right hand and gently traces their scars, moving from his hand to hers, and she can feel the shiver that runs through his body.

"So I think that you're not just upset about Will," she whispers.

“No,” he whispers back. He then mirrors her gesture, running his long, delicate finger across the matching scars, and the same chills run up and down her body as his finger lightly brushes her skin.

“And I think seeing me has upset you more than you’re letting on.”

“Yeah,” she says, flipping her left hand to fit over his and intertwining their fingers. And instead of a chill, she now feels a spark deep within her chest. She’s enveloped in a warmth she hasn’t felt in years, one she’s desperately missed.

“My mom,” Nancy says, “She kept trying to get me to admit how good you look this morning, and it really pissed me off.”

“Why,” he says, running his thumb across the back of her hand.

“Because she was right,” causing him to chuckle.

“My mom did the same thing to me. Med school looks good on you, Nance.”

She turns to him then and looks into the depths of his eyes. She sees both sadness and longing reflected back at her, and that’s all it takes for her to give into long buried feelings. She kisses him. It’s desperate and powerful, as if she’s channeling all of her anger and longing for him into a single kiss. And he returns it just as furiously, wrapping his arms around her and pulling her on to his lap. His touch always made her body come to life, no matter how long they dated. But this, tonight, is different. It’s all encompassing, and all she wants to do is consume herself in its flames.

“Get a room,” Steve yells as he leaves the bar, causing them to break apart suddenly. “And don’t forget, we have the rehearsal dinner tomorrow. So get some sleep.”

They watch him get into his car across the street and drive away before returning to their attention to each other. Nancy is taken aback by how quickly she remembers everything that drives him crazy, running her fingers through his hair, kissing him just behind his left ear, shifting herself forward to press her chest to his and creating just the right amount of friction between them in the

process. He responds in kind, cupping her face in his hands, nibbling her ear, grazing his hands gently over her breasts just enough to excite her. She has no idea how long the make out on the picnic table, but they finally come to panting with lips swollen and hair standing on end.

Nancy places her forehead on his and looks into his eyes while she catches her breath.

“Hey,” she says.

“Hey,” he returns, flashing her that crooked grin of his.

“So I think we should take Steve’s advice and get that room,” she says, continuing to play with the hair at the nape of his neck.

“Mmm hmmm,” he responds, closing his eyes, clearly enjoying her ministrations. “I’m on the couch at home, so I don’t think my place will work.”

“My old room is now the guest room, but the window still doesn’t have a screen . . . ,” she says smiling.

“Nancy Wheeler, do you want me to sneak into your room?” he asks, grinning.

“Why yes I do,” she says and nips his bottom lip. “Oh shit, our cars are still at the station.”

“I guess we’ll have to take a little walk,” he says and stands up, lifting her along with him. She wraps her legs around him, places her arms around his neck, and proceeds to kiss that favorite spot behind his ear.

“Hey, Nance,” he finally says laughing. “I don’t think we’ll ever make it to our cars if you keep doing that.”

“Fine,” she says and lowers herself to the ground. They half jog, half walk the five blocks or so to the station, stopping every now and then to make out in the shadows between storefronts. Nancy’s entire body is racing with hormones and excitement, and she can’t wait to get him into her old room.

Watching Jonathan crawl through her bedroom window immediately takes her back to her teenage years, when he would visit her at all hours of the night to soothe her from a nightmare or to talk or, like now, to make out, plain and simple. No matter how much he's come into his own, Jonathan still manages to look like a gawky teenager as he steps over her sill and onto the floor, all elbows and knees and floppy hair. He looks up at her and delivers another one of his heart-stopping crooked smiles, and a guffaw bursts from her lips.

"What?" he asks as he stands himself up to his full height.

"You look just like you did when you were 17," she answers with a grin.

"Oh come on," he says. "Please tell me I'm at least not as awkward as I used to be."

"Well, you're hair isn't quite as floppy," is all she can get out before he scoops her up into her arms and deposits her unceremoniously on the bed. She watches him as he shrugs off his denim jacket and crawls on top of her, settling himself between her legs.

"What was that you were saying?" he asks before trailing kisses down her neck.

"That you still look like a 17 year old," she says and breaks into laughter as he tickles her sides mercilessly.

"Want to try that again?"

"Hair . . . still . . . floppy," she tries to say between giggles, but she gives up when he, finally, kisses her long and hard. Her body is immediately consumed by desire once again. She pulls off his shirt, he rakes hers over her head, sighing together once there's no barrier between their bare skin. It might be years since they were last together like this, but it feels like it was just yesterday, knowing touches resulting in familiar sighs and moans. Jonathan starts to make his way down her body, kissing her gently as he moves from neck to chest to breasts to stomach. When he stops to unbutton her

jeans, he looks up at her with a wicked grin. She blushes to see the desire in his eyes but still manages to nod once. That's all it takes for him to gently tug off her jeans and kiss his way back up her inner thighs and settle himself where she craves him most.

Nancy's head is spinning, her heart is racing, and she's pretty sure she's panting. And when he adds two fingers to accompany his tongue and lips, she has to cover her face with her pillow to muffle her moan. She hasn't felt this alive in years, and it's all because of Jonathan. God, she's missed him, and she needs to kiss him now.

She gently tugs on his hair and, when he looks up at her, pupils blown wide with desire, she curls her finger at him invitingly. He immediately obeys, plying her with more kisses as he moves back up her body, stopping to tease her nipples along the way. Feeling the need to be in control, she flips him onto his back and straddles him, moaning as her softness meets his hardness. She rocks on him once, twice, and then drops down to kiss him once again, losing herself in his soft, wide mouth.

In between kisses, she suddenly decides to put into words what she's feeling. "I've missed you," she sighs as she trails kisses along his jaw. Jonathan goes completely still. It takes her a moment to realize that he's stopped moving. Confused, she lifts her head to see what's happened, and it's as if she's looking at a different person.

"Jonathan?"

He doesn't answer, looks away from her.

"Jonathan? Are you okay? What happened?"

"What happened, Nancy? I think I should be asking you that question," he challenges her in the same tone he used earlier in the evening. A chill runs up her spine, only this time it's not the result of desire.

"What do you mean?"

"Nancy, you cut me completely out of your life, never even bothered to get in touch with me, avoided me at all costs. I get that we're still

attracted to each other and wound up back here, but how can you say that you've missed me?"

"Why can't I miss you?" she asks feeling utterly deflated and suddenly self-conscious. She slips off of him and reaches for the blanket at the end of the bed, wrapping it around her shoulders.

"Because you don't get to miss me. It was your decision to break up. And I've been here for years if you wanted to see me, talk to me," he says getting more and more agitated. "Always hoping for a phone call or something. But you never even tried. So I moved on. And now you say you missed me? You don't get to do that."

"You left me, Jonathan, walked out on me and never looked back. You didn't even call to let me know you arrived in Washington. I had to call your mom when I didn't hear from you for a week. I think you made it pretty clear that we were over," her own agitation growing. She's trying her best to keep her voice down to avoid waking her family.

"I was angry and hurt. You said some cruel things to me, Nancy, things I never thought I'd hear from you. I was waiting for you to apologize to me not walk out of my life," he nearly yells.

"Keep your voice down, ok?" she pleads. "I really don't want my parents finding us like this."

The realization that her parents and siblings are just a few rooms away seems to temper his anger.

"Nancy, something happened after I left, I know it. I know our last year in New York was hard, but you just don't give up on a relationship like ours. Please tell me. I need to know," he says, reaching over to cup her chin in his hand, "Please?"

Nancy pushes his hand away and turns from him. She can't look at him now, she can't. He's right, something did happen, something she's never told anyone outside of a few random people in New York. She's buried it for years, thinking that chapter of her life was over. But who was she kidding? It was never over. This moment was going to come eventually, even though she never wanted to admit it to

herself. She has nothing left to lose now.

"I was pregnant," she whispers, refusing to look at him.

"What?"

"I was pregnant," she says a bit louder.

"Wait, what? You were pregnant?" Jonathan shakes his head in confusion. "I don't understand."

"I found out about the week after you left," she says turning back to face him. She doesn't say a word, simply lets him process the information. It takes him a few minutes, his face mirroring his emotions. Confusion turns into disbelief then sadness and, finally, anger.

"Why didn't you tell me? How could you make that decision without me, Nancy? It was my . . ."

"Don't you dare say those words to me. Don't you dare," she says, angrily. "I know it was your child, Jonathan, but I also knew that you just left for the opportunity of a lifetime, and I was weeks away from starting med school. I didn't know what to do. And then the decision was made for me . . . I lost the baby," she says, a sob following her last words.

His anger shifts momentarily to concern.

"You had a miscarriage?"

"Yes. It was pretty bad. I ended up in the ER and had to get a blood transfusion. I couldn't leave the apartment for nearly a week after that."

"Nancy, how could you not have told me? I would have been there for you? I loved you."

"Loved?" she asks, looking over to him. He's now sitting up across from her, hair still disheveled, reminding her of what they were doing just moments ago.

“That’s not fair,” he says coldly.

“I know,” she replies honestly, hanging her head to avoid his glare.

“Right before the miscarriage,” she continues, “I had planned to call you to try to figure this out. I was so confused, Jonathan, I felt like I was losing my mind. I didn’t think you wanted to be with me, and I didn’t want you to think that I had done this on purpose to trap you . . .”

“I would never think that, Nancy.”

“Never say never, right?” she says. He recoils as his own words from earlier in the evening are repeated back to him. “But I also knew that this was a decision we had to make together. And then when I woke up the next morning, I had started bleeding, and I was so scared. I didn’t even think to call anyone, just went straight to the hospital. It all happened so fast,” she’s full on crying now. “And at some point during everything, I decided this must be a sign that we weren’t meant to be together, the universe sending me a cruel, cruel message. And I never heard from you that week, not once. If I had, I don’t know, maybe I would made a different decision. But I decided that this chapter of my life was done. I cancelled our lease, packed up everything, and drove to Chicago.”

Jonathan is silent after she finishes, and she can’t bear it. “It was too much, Jonathan, too hard. I just couldn’t face you, face us after that.”

“You fucking retreated.”

“What?” she asks horrified.

“You retreated. You called me the coward, but you were the one who ran away from everything.”

“Wait, Jonathan. . . “

“No, you wait. You decided on your own to end our relationship. Do you know what that was like for me? I thought you met someone else or something, but it never crossed my mind . . . I can’t imagine what you went through, Nancy, and I’m sorry I wasn’t there. But you made that decision for me,” he says, getting up from the bed. He looks

around the room for his shirt, and she can see the tension in his shoulders and back. And when he turns to her, she's greeted with a look of what she can only describe as near hatred. She starts to sob even harder.

"Don't, Nancy, just don't. I can't believe I meant so little to you, that our relationship meant so little to you . . . "

"You didn't, it didn't. I loved you, Jonathan."

"That's not the way you treat someone you love, Nancy. You retreated, after everything, you walked away. I can't believe I fell for you again. Jesus, how stupid can I be," he says, grabbing his denim jacket and throwing open her bedroom door. He stomps down the stairs and slams the front door on his way out.

Nancy, still nearly naked, doesn't bother to move. Utterly devastated, she collapses on her bed and begins to sob in earnest. It's as if a dam has broken in her heart, and all of the fear and heartbreak from years ago now bursting through whatever wall she had built to keep it at bay, flooding all of her senses until she's utterly numb.

3. Friday

Notes for the Chapter:

This is a long one, folks. I knew there was a lot to cover, but I didn't realize just how much until I was finished. As always, enjoy and kudos and comments are always welcome!

Nancy wakes up in a haze. She can feel that she's not alone in her bed, but she has no idea who has joined her. She turns over slowly, the morning light blinding her for a minute, and realizes that Holly is slumbering beside her. She doesn't remember her little sister joining her or how she got under her covers. Everything after Jonathan left is a blur.

She turns back to look at her clock radio and sees that it's barely 8:00 a.m. She knows that the wedding festivities will begin shortly. They have to be at the Hawkins Junior High by 10:00 a.m. to help set up for the reception, followed by then the rehearsal dinner that night. God, how is she going to face the day after all that happened? She feels hollow, as if her insides have been scooped out of her. She knows she fucked up, probably ruined any chance of any type of relationship with Jonathan going forward, even a simple friendship. Plus she knows her mom isn't going to be too happy with her, either, especially since she essentially ditched any obligations she had yesterday. Why does she ever listen to Steve Harrington?

She figures she may as well start the day, get it over with in a sense, and she begins to lift herself out of the comfort of her covers.

"Nancy?" Holly says from beside her. "Are you up?"

"Yeah, I am," she says, lying back down and turning to her sister.

"Are you okay? I was so worried about you last night. I could hear you crying from my room," she says, concern etched on her face.

"I'm okay, or at least good enough to make it through the day."

"Mom and I came in to see what happened after Jonathan left, but we couldn't get you to talk to us, you just kept crying. So we somehow got you under the covers, and I stayed with you. I'm so sorry you're so sad."

"Don't be sorry. This is between me and Jonathan, and we'll figure it out somehow."

"Do I need to kick his ass today?"

"Holly! Language!"

"I'm 12, Nancy," she says defiantly, causing Nancy to laugh despite herself. "Do I?"

"No, Holly. You don't need to kick his ass—you probably need to kick mine, though. I think I really fucked up."

"Nancy! Language!" Holly cries, mimicking her older sister.

"Thanks for staying with me. I really appreciate it," Nancy says, truly moved by her sister's gesture. "Now, let's go face Mom."

"You go. I'm going to sleep some more, especially if I don't have any ass to kick," she says and flips herself onto her side, throwing the pillow over her head.

Nancy and her mother haven't always had the best relationship, neither one confiding in or worrying over the other nearly as much as they probably should, and Nancy has no idea how her mom is going to respond to her this morning. But when she turns the corner into the kitchen, her mother immediately envelopes her in an all-encompassing hug. Nancy is first taken aback by this sudden display of emotion but warms to the embrace quickly. She tries to hold back the tears, but she fails miserably.

"Oh honey," Karen says. "We could hear you arguing with Jonathan in your room, but I have no idea why. I was so worried when we found you after he left. Are you okay? Do you need anything? Do I need to call Hopper?"

"Why would you call Hopper?" Nancy asks, sniffing as she breaks

away from the embrace.

“To deal with Jonathan, of course. No one walks out on my daughter like that.”

“No, mom, neither you, Hopper, or Holly need to deal with Jonathan. I brought this on myself.”

“Do you want to talk about it?”

“Don’t we need to leave in like an hour?”

“Yes, but this is important, and we have time. Here, let me make you some tea.”

Nancy sits down at the kitchen table and tries to block the look on Jonathan’s face when he left last night out of her mind. But she can’t, and the tears start to fall again. She gives up on trying to stop them.

“Here you go, honey,” her mom says, placing the steaming mug of black tea in front of her and sitting beside her at the table. They sit in companionable silence for about five minutes or so before Nancy begins.

“Do you know why we broke up?” Nancy asks her mother, who shakes her head no.

“You know that our last year in New York had been tough with both of us trying to balance school and plans for after graduation,” her mom nods. “We had the worst fight ever on the day he left for his internship in Washington. We couldn’t agree about what to do with our apartment. I wanted to break the lease, he didn’t because he wanted a place to come home to after his internship was done. The fight was really about where we were heading as a couple, and I had hoped that he would join me in Chicago. But instead of saying that, I called him a coward, accused him of running away when things got tough.”

“I can’t imagine he took that well.”

“Right. I had never seen him look so hurt or so angry. He left without a word and then never called me or let me know that he had arrived

in D.C. Nothing.”

“Did you try to apologize?”

“No. Mainly because I was still hurt by the fact that he wasn’t interested in trying to stay in the same city, but then I, um—God, mom, this is so hard—I found out I was pregnant.”

Nancy takes a sip of her tea and lets her news sink in for a minute. Her mom doesn’t look shocked or even upset, mainly just concerned.

“Did Jonathan know?”

“No, I just told him last night.”

Her mother’s eyes widen in response to that news, but she quickly gathers her emotions.

“Why didn’t you tell him before?”

“I didn’t know what to do. I was so scared and confused. We had both worked so hard to get where we were, and I knew a baby would complicate things. So I waited a few days to try to figure out what to do, and just before I was going to call him, I had a miscarriage.”

“Nancy, sweetheart,” her mom says, taking her hand in hers. “I’m so sorry. Were you okay?”

Nancy nods her head, trying to get ahold of her emotions.

“Why didn’t you call me? I would have flown to New York, honey,” Karen says, pushing a stray hair behind Nancy’s ear.

All Nancy can do is shrug in response.

“I was too upset to call anyone, mom. I don’t know. I can’t explain it. I didn’t want to talk to anyone except Jonathan, but I when he didn’t call or try to reach out to me . . . well, I took it as a sign, and I broke it off. You know the rest,” she finishes taking a deep breath.

“So that’s why he was so mad last night.”

Nancy nods.

“Oh sweetie,” her mother says as she reaches across the table to embrace her.

“What do I do, mom?”

“How do you feel about Jonathan? Do you still love him?”

“I don’t know. I might, but now, I can’t imagine he’s going to forgive me enough to even be friends. God, I don’t think I can face seeing him today.”

“Nancy Diana Wheeler, you are the strongest person I know,” her mother says, breaking their hug but holding fast to her shoulders. “You hold your head up and face him. I’m not saying it’s going to be easy, but you have nothing to hide. The past is the past, and you can only look to the future now.”

Nancy nods again.

“Now, go get showered. We’ve got work to do.”

It’s not surprising there isn’t anything traditional about Mike and Jane’s wedding. Instead of getting married at a church, they are having their wedding and reception in the Hawkins Junior High School auditorium, where they had their first kiss during the 1984 Snowball Dance. It perplexes members of the Wheeler clan to no end, particularly her father, which makes Nancy smile every time she thinks of it. And while she thinks it’s perfect and is proud of them for following their hearts, it’s one a hell of a lot of work. She’s now suspended high up on a ladder trying to make a crepe paper canopy, which scares the shit out of her (although she’ll never admit it to anyone).

Yet despite how nervous it makes her, she appreciates being out of the fray. She can focus on her task at hand and not have to speak to many people. No one will ask her why she looks like shit (and she really does), and, most important, she can easily keep an eye on Jonathan and avoid him as much as possible.

“Throw over that roll of crepe paper, will ya?” Hopper calls from the other side of the dance floor, over which the canopy is being built. He’s another person who’s trying to avoid the madness below, and they make a great team, focused, efficient, and blissfully quiet. They are nearly done with the task at hand, when everything changes.

“So what happened last night?” he asks, breaking their silent routine.

“What do you mean?” she asks trying to be nonchalant.

“Come on, Nancy. Something went down last night with you and Jonathan. He looks like shit this morning, and so do you. Plus he’s in a shitty mood, and you know what that’s like.”

“Did you ask him?”

“Yeah, right. You know damn well that would be a futile activity.”

She laughs at that.

“Hey look, I don’t want to pry, and I know it’s complicated, but I can tell something’s amiss, and it’s not just having you two in the same room for the first time in years. I honestly haven’t seen him this upset in a long time, and Joyce is worried . . . “

“And if Joyce is worried, you’re worried. I know, Hop,” she interrupts. He nods in understanding. “Let’s just say that Jonathan and I finally talked about our break up, and it didn’t go very well. I think we’re both working through a few long buried issues.”

“Well, that’s fair,” Hopper says and, having just completed the last of the paper arches, begins to slowly walk his way down the ladder. She follows suit, and when she reaches the bottom, he’s there waiting for her.

“Just try to get this figured out, kid, I hate seeing you both like this,” he says and gives her a quick kiss on the forehead. Nancy watches him walk away to surprise Jane by swooping her up in a giant bear hug, and she struggles to fight back tears for the hundredth time that day.

Wanting to marvel at the beauty of the archway over the dance floor,

she takes a step back and immediately runs into someone. “Oh I’m so sorry,” she says as she turns around to continue her apology and finds herself face to face with Jonathan. Hopper was right, he does look like shit. Dark circles under his eyes, and his complexion is paler than usual.

“I’m sorry, I didn’t see you there . . . I wasn’t paying any attention trying to get a picture of Hop and Jane . . .” they say at the same time, speaking over the other. Nancy immediately turns her head away to avoid looking him in the eye and quickly says, “I’m sorry, Jonathan,” before walking away to find another task to keep her busy. She waits until she’s at least 20 paces away from him before wiping away the tears that have started to fall once again.

She wanders aimlessly for a bit, trying to find a quiet task to keep herself busy. Having no luck, she tracks down her mom, who puts her to work setting up folding chairs for the ceremony, at the other side of the gym. It the perfect task for her—physical, repetitive, and, since no one else really wants to help, solitary. As she settles into a rhythm, she watches her family and friends work their magic, transforming the junior high gym into a true thing of beauty. Nancy never knew how stunning strands of white lights and crepe paper could be—it’s better than any Snow Ball she ever attended. After a full hour of unfolding and moving dozens of chairs, her task is complete. She grabs a bottle of water and sits to rest for a minute.

She can see her mom and Joyce fussing over the final details at the altar, Hopper and her dad watching the madness together, and the kids talking and laughing, with Mike and Jane at the center looking happier than she’s ever seen them. Jonathan is there, too, on the sidelines, capturing it all with his camera and stopping now and again to chat with everyone. Despite his physical appearance, he’s managing to smile and even joke, and her heart aches to see him, to not be part of his orbit.

She’s been pondering her mother’s question all morning—Is she still in love with him?—and she knows that she is. She never stopped loving him, just tried to bury it deep inside under layers of pride and stubbornness. And now she’s mourning the loss of her relationship all over again. But this time the very thing she loves and lost is standing right in front of her just out of reach.

“Hey, Nancy, are you okay?”

She turns to see Mike standing beside her, a look of true concern on his face.

“Don’t worry about me, Mike. This is your big weekend.”

“Don’t be a martyr.”

“I’m not trying to be, honestly,” she says looking up at him. “Watching you and Jane just now, you both just look so happy, and I want to keep it that way.”

“It’s hard to be happy when I see you over here by yourself, wiping tears off your face all morning. I’ve barely seen you since you’ve gotten back into town, and when I finally do, you’re miserable,” he says sitting in the chair beside hers.

“I knew this weekend wasn’t going to be easy, but I had no idea seeing Jonathan again would be this complicated or this hard.”

“I always thought it would be you two, you know, getting married first. It never crossed my mind that it would be us.”

“Yeah, well, things change,” she says quickly trying to change the subject. “I shouldn’t have waited this long to talk to him, shouldn’t have forced it onto the back of your wedding. It’s not fair to anyone, and I’m sorry.”

“It’s okay, Nance,” he says, and, hearing a peal of laughter from across the gym, they both turn their attention to the antics ensuing over on the dance floor, where Dustin is trying to do the Kid n’ Play with Lucas. It’s not going well. “We’re all heading over to Sam’s for lunch. Will you join us?”

“I’d love to,” she says elbowing him in the ribs.

“Hey, stop that. I’m not a kid anymore,” he says, sounding exactly like he did at 13.

“But you’re still my little brother,” she says and pulls him into a hug. She’s surprised when he wraps his arms around her tightly. She’s

even more surprised when he whispers into her ear, “Let me know if I need to kick Jonathan’s ass. I know he has a mean right punch, but I’ve got 30 pounds on him.” And with that he pulls away and runs over to join his friends. She’s both amazed and comforted by how protective her family is of her.

A slight movement from the side of the room catches her eye, and she turns to find Jonathan, kneeling down with his camera in his hands. He must have taken a picture of her and Mike during their conversation. She’s sure it will be an amazing photo, capturing an intimate moment between siblings. And then it hits her, how much their relationship has come full circle, starting with the night he took her picture at Steve’s all those years ago—perhaps they were meant to be strangers, forever trapped on either side of a camera lens.

Nancy quickly gets up to gather her things before leaving for lunch when she hears Hopper call out across the gym, “Hey, Jonathan, someone’s here to see you.”

Nancy turns toward Hop’s voice and sees a woman she doesn’t recognize standing next to him. She’s petit, like Nancy, but the similarities end there. Her hair is light blonde and cropped short in a Pixie cut, and she’s dressed stylishly in tight black jeans with holes in the knees and a cropped Joy Division t-shirt. She’s clearly not from around here.

“Anna?” she hears Jonathan’s voice right behind her.

“Jonathan,” Anna says, both sounding and looking relieved to see him.

Nancy’s heart stops.

Jonathan rushes past Nancy, brushing his arm into hers and knocking her off balance in the process. He doesn’t notice. Once she regains her balance, Nancy watches as he crosses the room, looking terribly confused and struggles to hear their conversation.

“What are you doing here,” he says loudly as he stops in front of his ex.

"I, um, wanted to see you," Anna says looking as uncomfortable as Nancy feels. She can't hear the rest of their conversation, but notices the confusion in Jonathan's face. She can't miss Anna's scan of the room, her gaze stopping when she reaches Nancy, a look of recognition replacing confusion.

"Hey, Nance, are you ready?" Mike suddenly calls out. Nancy knows that's her brother is trying to break up the terribly awkward and potentially disastrous scene unfolding in front of him, but all it does is draw even more attention to the situation.

"Coming," she says quietly, turning away quickly to avoid Anna's icy gaze. Nancy can't help but glance back across to the room as she leaves and notices Anna looking her up and down, judgement clearly evident on her face. She knows that she's looked better—puffy eyes, disheveled hair, an oversized Hawkins AV Club t-shirt, and mom jeans are clearly not her preferred look—but she doesn't deserve the disdain that she's clearly receiving from this stranger.

The awkwardness she was feeling suddenly turns to anger. How dare Anna show up here and look at her like that? What right does she have? Nancy can feel the adrenaline starting to work its way through her limbs, and she starts to turn around and give Anna a piece of her mind, when Will suddenly calls out, "Hey, Anna, we didn't expect to see you," as he crosses the room. His interference was perfectly timed, and Mike takes advantage of the moment to grab his sister by the hand and drag her outside.

"Subtle, Mike," Nancy says angrily.

"Pot, kettle, Nancy," Mike says gesturing between them.

Nancy has to admit, he has a point.

The drive to Sam's diner with Mike and Jane is silent, except for the radio playing in the background. Nancy would much rather dive back into her bed and bury herself under her covers until Sunday when it's time for her to go home, but she has to pull herself together for the two people sitting in the front seat. So she tries to get her emotions

under control. She's fluctuating between anger, jealousy, and heartbreak, with the latter currently overwhelming the others.

Anna just traveled thousands of miles for Jonathan, walked into a room of strangers for him. How can she ever compete with that, after everything that's happened between them? After last night? She tries her best to stop herself from crying, but the tears fall on their accord. She catches Mike's eye in the rearview mirror, and she can see how frustrated he is with her. She can't blame him.

She's quiet for most of the lunch, figures it best to stick to herself as much as possible. She knows the entire situation makes everyone uncomfortable, and she hates that she's causing such anxiety. Will finally joins the group after about 20 minutes or so. He avoids Nancy's eye and tries to discretely let his friends know that after introducing Anna to everyone, she and Jonathan left together. She can't hear him very clearly, but she's pretty sure he said that Jonathan looked pretty miserable, and Nancy takes some small satisfaction in the news.

As she picks at her burger and fries, Jane and Max include her in their discussion of final plans about tomorrow morning, figuring out who will pick up breakfast—and champagne—and who will make sure everyone makes it to the salon on time. Moving on from the family drama, the boys engross themselves in a conversation about gaming, Magic the Gathering now replacing Dungeons & Dragons in their banter.

Max leaves them to join the fun at the other end of the table, and Jane and Nancy sit in silence for a minute.

"I'm sorry that I brought up Nathan and Anna the other night, Nancy. I hope it didn't contribute to the fight with Jonathan," Jane finally says.

"Oh no, Jane. That had nothing to do with it. Please don't think that," Nancy responds. "I'm sorry about all of the drama we've caused when it's your big weekend. I didn't plan on this happening."

"I know," Jane says. "Besides how could you know that Anna would show up? She's always refused to come to Hawkins, insisting

Jonathan stay with her out east. Then dropping in unannounced to a wedding? Who does that?"

"Only love makes you that crazy and stupid," Nancy says, echoing a long past conversation she had with Flo, Hopper's former secretary at the station.

"I don't think it's love, honestly. I think it's jealousy."

"Jealousy? Of what?"

Jane just looks at her.

"Are you kidding? It's been years since Jonathan and I were together. There's nothing to be jealous of—our relationship is over."

Jane smirks in response.

"What?"

"Jonathan told me about the job offer with the *Tribune*. He says he wants to take it to be closer to family, but I know that it's really about you. Anna was right to break up with him—she's not who he wants to be with. Which is why I have no idea why she came here. It's a lost cause."

Nancy feels a momentary spark of hope that all may not be lost, but she immediately tamps it down. "I don't think it's me, Jane, truly. Jonathan and I hurt each other terribly, and I'm not sure if we can ever recover from it. "

Jane doesn't respond for a moment, focusing her attention instead on the salt and pepper shakers in the center of their table, making them spin and dance as if on their own volition. Nancy knows she must be thinking. When they come to rest back in their original spots, Jane finally speaks.

"Nancy, I love Jonathan, and I love you. I don't know what happened between you, but I want you both to be happy, whatever that takes."

Nancy has no response for the amazing woman sitting across from her; someone who experienced so much trauma early in her life yet

still manages to love so freely. So she smiles instead, wiping even more tears from her eyes.

“Please don’t cry, Nancy. It makes Mike really uncomfortable.”

Nancy’s response can only be described as a guffaw. Jane looks at her with a shocked expression before she starts to giggle. And that’s all it takes for Nancy to break down into a fit of laughter, lifting a bit of the weight she’s felt ever since waking up.

After lunch, Mike drops Jane back off at home—Nancy can’t help but notice that Jonathan’s Ford is conspicuously absent—and they then head home to make sure everything’s under control. Karen hugs Nancy upon her return, but doesn’t say a word about anything, simply asks her to clear out of her old room to make way for her grandparents, who are staying with them over the weekend. Nancy gathers the few belongings she’s brought with her from Chicago and moves into Holly’s room. It’s probably for the best, at least she won’t be reminded of last night or the many nights she spent with Jonathan in her room. By 4:00, everything is well under control, and she has a few hours to kill before they need to head to the rehearsal dinner. She figures it’ll be a long night, so she decides to take a quick nap. Sinking down into Holly’s pillow-top mattress, Nancy falls asleep easily.

“Nancy! Nancy! Wake up, Nancy, please!” she hears as she comes to. She’s drenched in sweat, breathing heavily, and utterly confused.

“Holly?” Nancy pants out.

“You were crying Nancy and calling out. You called for Barb and Jonathan, and you sounded so scared,” Holly says, clearly shaken.

“I’m sorry, Holly. I didn’t meant to scare you,” she says, sitting up to hug her sister. “I’ll be okay, I promise. Can you do me a favor?” Nancy asks. Holly nods in response. “Can you get me a glass of water?” Holly nods again and heads downstairs.

Once Holly has left, Nancy drops back down into the bed and tries to make sense of what just happened. She clearly had a nightmare, but

she can only remember bits and pieces. She knows she was in the Upside Down, can still feel the oily residue of that covered the landscape on her arms and face. She remembers that Barb was still alive, calling out to her, always out of reach. And, worst of all, she remembers seeing Jonathan, but he was dead, his lifeless body buried by the vines she remembers so clearly. She's immediately nauseated thinking about it and hauls herself out of bed to the bathroom, where she splashes cool water on her face and neck. This is bad, Wheeler, she thinks to herself. Jonathan is frequently a part of her nightmares, but he's always calling to her, just out of reach, but not this. Never this.

"Nancy?" she hears Holly call from her room.

"I'm in the bathroom," she replies. Holly brings her the glass of water, which she downs in one quick swallow.

"What time is it kiddo?"

"A little after 5."

"Okay, I'm going to hop in the shower and pull myself together."

Holly nods, still looking oddly at her sister. "Are you sure you're okay? Do you need me to stay with you?"

"I'll be fine, I promise. Thank you though," she says and hugs Holly one last time before she closes and locks the door. She runs the hottest shower she can stand and allows herself a good long cry as she the hot water runs over her body. She's made many mistakes in her life, and letting go of Jonathan the way she did was her worst one. Why did it take her this long to figure it out?

When she feels as if she can't shed another tear, she washes her hair and face and emerges into the now sauna-like bathroom. She dries off, wrapping one of her mom's bath sheets around her body and takes a look at herself in the mirror. The shower has helped. Her head feels a bit clearer, her body less empty, and the puffiness around her eyes is beginning to fade a bit. She decides then and there that she won't avoid Jonathan tonight. He knows the truth now, and her mom is right, all she can do now is think of the future, even if

Anna may be a part of it. It's time for her to accept the consequences of her decision and hope that some semblance of a relationship can be salvaged with him. What does she have left to lose?

Nancy's family arrives at the gym earlier than everyone else and tries to enjoy their last few minutes as their original nuclear family. What this mainly means is that Holly and Mike annoy each other, while Nancy ignores them by focusing on her nails, and her parents tell them to stop every couple of minutes or more. Nancy feels strung like a live wire, all nervous tension and energy. She's anxious to see Jonathan after that terrible dream, but she's also afraid of the fact that Anna may be with him.

When the Byers-Hoppers finally arrive, apologizing because Joyce misplaced her keys ("I know, I know," Joyce says shrugging her shoulders), Nancy feels her nerves settle the minute she sees Jonathan—living proof that her nightmare wasn't real. When he turns her way, she actually smiles across the room at him, relieved to see his brown eyes full of life. He seems taken aback by her smile and simply stares at her with a confused look before retreating to the side of the room to get his camera equipment ready. Nancy quickly notices that Anna is not with them. She wonders if she's left Hawkins or will simply meet them at dinner. She knows she shouldn't hope for the former, but she can't really help herself.

The rehearsal goes as all wedding rehearsals do—lots of confusion as first, followed by one person taking charge (Hopper in their case), which ultimately leads for smooth sailing and lots of emotional family members as the reality of the upcoming event sets in. Nancy is thrilled to find out that she'll be walking down the aisle with Dustin, who greets her with his trademark faux purr. Nancy can't help but growl back to him, her free hand forming a claw and swiping at his chest. They laugh their way down the aisle, much to everyone's annoyance.

Following the rehearsal, the group heads to Giovanni's, Hawkins' nicest restaurant. Mike and Jane insisted that only their closest friends and family are welcome, despite her parent's protests and guilt trips about grandparents and extended family. But the two

insisted that it only be the original crew—The Party Extended, as Dustin likes to call it—for this last night before their big day. Looking around the small party room and seeing the faces of all the people she loves most in the world smiling and happy makes her warm inside, despite her lingering heartache. Nancy takes a strategic seat between her mother and Steve and directly across from Joyce and Will. Jonathan is at the end of the table next to Hopper, camera at the ready.

“She’s not here, Nancy. You can relax,” Steve whispers into her ear. She looks over to Steve and raises her eyebrows. He knows exactly what she’s asking. “I can’t tell you what happened. All I know is that she left Hawkins.”

She feels an immediate relief wash over. The rest of the evening goes by smoothly. She does catch Jonathan looking over at her time and again, but, to be fair, he catches her looking at him, too.

After dinner, the speeches begin. Hopper starts the night off, delivering a short but heartfelt speech about how Jane made him want a family again after some tough years. Joyce, of course, cries through the entire speech, causing Will and Jonathan to roll their eyes. Nancy’s dad is next, and it’s a predictable speech, full of sports metaphors and talk of becoming a man. Mike rolls his eyes every chance he gets. As maid-of-honor, Max delivers an endearing speech about friendship and life as the two female members of The Party, leaving everyone laughing. Finally Will, the best man, is up. He stands and looks around the entire room before settling his eyes on his best friend, her brother.

“Mike once told me that the best decision he ever made in life was saying hi to me on the playground in kindergarten, but I think he’s wrong. The best decision he ever made was allowing El to hide under a card table in his basement despite the protests of his friends and the danger it brought to him and his family,” Will begins, causing everyone in the room to go utterly silent. Will doesn’t often speak about what happened to him all those years ago, and this is clearly a special moment.

“We can all look back at fall of 1983 and the year after and remember all of the terrible things that happened, but looking around

this room tonight, I'm reminded of all of the amazing things that came out of those experiences. The Party grew in both number and strength; my mom found Hop and Hop found El; Jonathan and I gained a father and a sister; Dustin found a brother in Steve; and Mike and El found each other. There wouldn't be so much love in this room tonight if it wasn't for those experiences. I'm not saying that this cancels out what happened—it never will—but it does mean that there's always hope as long as there is friendship and love. Here's to Mike and El, and here's to love," Will says holding up his glass. He then turns Jonathan, who nods once in response. Nancy can't help but cry again, but no one really notices, as there's not a dry eye in the room.

The Party decides to head back to Duffy's for one last round before the big day, inviting the older siblings, including Steve, to join in. Nancy declines at first—she's not sure that a third night at Duffy's will do her any good.

"Ah, come on, Nancy," Dustin pleads. "I can give you a few dance lessons so that we'll be the life of the party tomorrow. Huh? Huh?"

"It's tempting, Dustin, but I think I need to get some sleep tonight."

"Nancy, come on," Mike calls from across the room. "This is your last chance to hang out with your brother as a single man."

"Why do I care if you're single or not, Mike? It's not like you and Jane haven't been together for years," she calls back.

"Nancy, just come on," Mike calls, clearly annoyed, followed by assorted calls from Lucas and Dustin offering their own encouragement.

"Fine, fine, I'll go. But just for an hour. Happy now?"

Woots and whistles greet her from the group. "Now, who will give me a ride?"

"Lucas, Lucas, slow down. You're moving too fast!"

"Come on, Nancy, I know you can keep up. If Dustin can do it, you

can do it,” Lucas replies. For the last half hour, everyone except Jonathan and Will have been on the dance floor showing off their moves for tomorrow. It quickly becomes clear that Lucas is the only one of them with any type of dancing skills, and he’s been trying his best to get Nancy to do the Kid n’ Play for the last 10 minutes or so.

“I give up,” she yells above the music. And leaves the dance floor laughing, followed by a series of protests. She takes a seat at the bar and watches the continued antics on the dance floor. She feels much better than earlier tonight, but she can’t help but keep her eye on the Byers brothers, who have been in an intense conversation since they entered the bar. Based on his facial expressions, Will looks rather upset with his older brother, who is sitting in the corner of the booth chain smoking. Nancy wonders if the conversation has anything to do with her.

“Taking a break?” Steve asks and sits down next to her at the bar.

“Yeah. I was pretty hopeless out there, and it’s much more amusing to watch them all make fools of themselves.”

“And to keep your eye on that conversation over there in the corner,” Steve says, calling her out once again.

“I don’t remember you being this intuitive, Steve.”

“I’ve spent a lot more time observing people, Nancy, and you’ve had your eye on that table since we got here.”

“Sorry.”

“There’s no need to apologize. All I know is that I left you and Byers last night sucking face and found you this morning looking like shit and avoiding each other like the plague. I don’t know what happened in those 8 hours or so, but something did.”

“Let’s just say we had something like a come to Jesus moment, and it didn’t go well. Add in an ex-girlfriend, and . . .”

“Nance, this sounds weird, given our history and all, but I’m rooting for you two. You were a pretty great couple, and anyone can see how much you love each other . . .”

“You just said love,” she interrupts.

Steve shrugs.

“I’d just hate to see that go to waste, that’s all.”

Nancy doesn’t respond, just reaches over and squeezes his hand. He leans over and kisses her on the cheek and leaves her to join Max on the dance floor.

The music suddenly changes to a slow song, and the dance party breaks up, except for the couples, who are now swaying slowly to the song. Nancy realizes it’s “With or Without You” by U2, and she chuckles at the fact that it’s just a bit too on the nose for her current situation.

She notices Dustin approaching her with a goofy grin on his face. “May I have this dance?” he asks her.

“Of course,” she responds, giving in to her soft spot for him. Aside from Will, who has a special place in her heart for too many reasons, Dustin has always been her favorite of Mike’s childhood friends.

He leads her out onto the small dance floor and places his hands at her waist, while she wraps hers around his neck. And they sway just like they did all those years ago at the Snowball Dance, except Dustin is now nearly a foot taller than she is.

“Am I still the favorite?” he asks cheekily.

“Would I be out here if you weren’t?”

“Good point.”

They sway to the song for a few minutes. Steve was right—she’d been watching Will and Jonathan all night long—and she’s grateful for the momentary distraction.

“Thanks, Dustin,” Nancy says.

“No problem, Nancy. I still appreciate you cheering me up all those years ago, and I wanted to return the favor.”

She leans up and gives him a kiss on the cheek, causing him to blush and laugh, and they continue their slow dance.

“May I cut in?” asks a familiar voice from behind her.

Nancy turns to see Jonathan, hands in his pockets. She can’t quite figure out why he’s here—he looks like he’d rather be anywhere else. Her confusion must be evident on her face.

“Please, Nancy. I just want to talk,” he says.

“Nancy?” Dustin asks.

“It’s okay Dustin, really,” she says before turning back to Jonathan and extending her hand to him. He finally takes his hands out of his pockets and quickly pulls her into his orbit. He wraps one arm around her waist and brings the hand he’s holding into his chest. It’s exactly how they used to dance together—it’s intimate and close and reminds her of just how well their bodies fit together. Yet despite the ease with which Jonathan arranged them, she can feel how tense he is.

She figures it’s best to let him take control of the situation—she owes him at least that much. So she closes her eyes and focuses on the small details of the moment. Warmth radiates out from the small of her back, where his hand has come to rest. And he smells like cigarettes and the mint shampoo that he must still use, and, when she moves just right, she can smell the scent that is uniquely him.

“Do you think this song hits a little too close to home right now?” he asks.

She laughs in response. “I thought the same thing when it first came on.” She can’t hear but can feel his chuckle in the vibration of his chest.

“How’s Anna?” she asks, she can’t help it.

“On a flight back to New York,” he says coldly.

“What happened?”

“Can we not talk about that right now?”

She nods in response, and they return to their silent dance.

“I’m sorry for leaving the way I did last night,” Jonathan finally says, looking down at her. “I know how hard that must have been for you to tell me about everything, and it wasn’t fair of me to be so cruel.”

“I’m sorry for, well, everything,” she says, finally looking up into his eyes. The neutral expression he’s been wearing all day has been replaced by one of sadness. She reaches up with her free hand and caresses his cheek. He closes his eyes at her touch.

“I don’t know why I ever thought cutting you out of my life, not telling you about the baby, was the right thing to do. It didn’t solve anything and only hurt us more than I ever imagined it could.” He opens his eyes then, and she thinks she might see a light that wasn’t there before.

“And I let my pride and my anger get the best of me. I should have called you after I left New York. I wanted an apology from you, and I let that ruin everything. And then it was easier to just avoid all of it, move on. But I never really did,” he says pulling her even closer.

“How could we have fought monsters together and yet be so scared to tell each other the truth or apologize?” she asks.

“With our Without You” comes to an end, and “All I Want Is You” immediately starts to play. Jonathan suddenly rolls his eyes.

“What?” Nancy asks a bit taken aback.

“This is all Will,” Jonathan says. “I think he’s sending us a message.”

“Ah. He’s on a bit of a roll tonight,” Nancy says. “That toast!”

“I know,” he says and adjusts their pace to the new song.

“I’ve actually thought a lot about that question today—why are we so scared to face each other after everything? Fighting a monster is terrifying, Nancy, but you win or you don’t. And if you don’t, well, that’s it. But with us, no matter what happens, you still have to live

your life with our without the person you love. The without—that’s fucking terrifying,” he says, lifting her head to look more directly into her eyes. “More terrifying than any demogorgon or shadow monster.”

“But we still ended up apart.”

“We never let our fear get the best of us when it came to monsters, Nancy, but when it came to each other, I think we were too scared to admit that something may have been wrong. It was easier for us to run than to fight.”

Letting his words sink in, Nancy places her head on his shoulder and her hand on his chest. She can hear and feel his heart beating, a steady, solid rhythm—a stark contrast to the lifeless body from her nightmare earlier in the day.

“I had a nightmare this afternoon,” she says not looking up at him and focusing on her hand instead. “About you. And Barb. She was alive and calling out to me, and you . . . you were . . . gone, Jonathan, dead,” she says and lets out a sob that sends shudders through her entire body. The dam that burst last night reopens and years of mourning come pouring out of her. Mourning for their relationship, for their lost child, for the future that she once saw in his eyes, for the years they lost. She feels his arms envelop her, and she sobs even harder.

“It’s okay. I’m here. I’ve got you. It’s okay,” she hears Jonathan whisper over and over again into her ear, gently rubbing her back. She has no idea how long the stay this way—Jonathan embracing her tightly as she sobs in his arms. All she knows is that when she finally takes a shuddering breath and lifts her head, the music is no longer playing and the bar is nearly empty. Their friends and family have left, and only a few regulars nursing their drinks at the bar remain.

She looks up at Jonathan then and sees that he’s been crying too. She breaks a hand free and wipes a tear from his cheek.

“I love you, Jonathan,” she says and moves her fingers to his mouth, preventing him from interrupting her. “I don’t expect you to love me back, not after everything. I just want you to know that I’ve never stopped loving you. And I’m sorry it took me so long to tell you.”

He doesn't say anything, cupping her head in his hands instead, and leans down to give her a single kiss to her forehead.

"Can you take me home now?" she asks.

"Sure, Nance, I'll take you home."

Jonathan walks her to the front door of her family's Maple Street home, gives her a kiss on the cheek and turns to go, but she stops him in his tracks.

"Stay?" she asks.

It takes him only a minute to make his decision, and he follows her as she leads him by the hand inside and to the basement door.

"Where are we going?" he asks quietly.

"My grandparents are in my old room, and I'm staying in Holly's. She loves you, Jonathan, but I don't think she'd appreciate both of us in her bed."

He laughs in response.

She leads him down the stairs and onto the old plaid couch. He sits down and begins to take his shoes and jacket off, and she goes into the laundry room and pulls out a pillow and blanket. When she comes back into the room, he's already lying on his side.

"Here, this will be more comfortable," she says handing him the pillow. He places it between his arm and head and then looks up at her expectantly.

She sits and takes her shoes off and reaches across him to turn off the lamp. She then lies down on her side and tucks herself into his body. He throws the blanket across them both and wraps his free arm across her body, pulling her even closer to him.

"Goodnight, Jonathan."

"Goodnight, Nancy," he says. The last thing she remembers is a

gentle kiss on the top of her head before falling into a deep, peaceful sleep.

4. Saturday

Notes for the Chapter:

I may have let myself get a bit too cheesy or cliché in this chapter, but I wanted to reclaim some elements of the Stranger Things world that I felt would still mean something to these characters years later and, in the end, I just want them all to be happy.

Light streaming through the window of the basement door wakes Nancy in the morning. She has no idea what time it is, but she figures it must be early. She can't hear anyone moving upstairs and there's no smell of coffee wafting down from the kitchen—a sure sign her mother has yet to start her day. Jonathan still has his arm around her waist, and he's buried his head into the small crook between her neck and shoulder. She hates to disturb his sleep—and leave this safe cocoon of his arms, something she's missed terribly—but she knows that he should probably leave soon.

She flips herself over gently so that she's now facing him, and he groans in response. "Please mom, just a few more minutes," he says with a grin, keeping his eyes closed tight.

"How long have you been awake?" she asks.

"Not long. I felt you start to move a few minutes ago."

"I'm sorry. I didn't mean to wake you."

He hums in response.

Nancy indulges herself in a very old habit, tucking herself under Jonathan's chin. It's one of her favorite places in the world, safe and warm, and Jonathan pulls her closer to him.

She knows she needs to bring up Anna. She refuses to let this intimacy continue much longer without knowing definitively where they stand, but she also knows the moment she mentions her name that the spell will be broken. But with so little time to spare this

morning, she decides to go for it. She takes a deep breath and asks, "Can you tell me what happened with Anna?"

She feels Jonathan go very still, but he doesn't pull away from her either.

"I told you, she went back to New York."

"Jonathan, please."

He sighs. "We talked, Nancy, for a long time."

"Why did she come here?"

"She said that she got a last-minute invite to a show in Chicago with an artist she used to rep, so she decided to check it out. And when she realized what weekend it was and that I was only a few hours away she thought it might be good to see me."

"Why?"

"She said it was because she didn't think our relationship had any closure. And she thought seeing me here, in my home, might help with that."

"Or might make her want to move to Chicago."

"Yes. Or might make her want to move," he pauses for a moment. "I told her to go home."

"Home?"

"Back to New York. Seeing her here in Hawkins with my family and friends . . . well, she doesn't fit. Not here and not with me. Not anymore."

"Did you tell her that?"

"That's really none of your business, Nancy," he says sharply. She cringes, knowing that she has clearly crossed the line. After a deep breath, he continues, "It wasn't an easy conversation. Nothing about this weekend has been easy."

Nancy doesn't respond. Jonathan pulls away from her then, giving himself enough room to look at her.

"Nance, I don't know what's going on between us, where this is going, but I do know that Anna isn't part of my future. And I made that very clear to her."

"Thank you. For telling me," she says, and he nods in response.

"I need to head home soon. It won't be long before the craziness begins," he says, turning over on his back and breaking their embrace.

"I know," she sighs. "I'm so excited for them, but I'd also love to stay here. You don't think they'd miss us, do you, if we hid in the basement all day?"

Jonathan laughs and looks back over to her, bringing his hand up and gently pushing a stray strand of hair out of her face.

"It does sound tempting . . . but think of the look on Hop's face if found us down here hiding out. Or your mom."

"Oh god, no," she groans. "What are you still doing here, Jonathan, get up already," she says playfully pushing him away from her.

Jonathan manages to untangle himself from her and the blanket and sits up to pull on his shoes. He then stands and reaches out a hand to help pull her up.

"Why don't you go out the basement door," she says. "I don't want to deal with any curious family members this morning."

He looks at her gratefully, grabbing his coat on his way over to the door.

She follows. "Thank you. For staying last night. For this morning."

"Of course," he says, reaching out to move that same stray strand of hair back behind her ear. "See you soon, Nance."

"See ya," she says and watches him until he's out of sight.

Once Nancy opens the basement door, she's bombarded.

"Nancy, there you are," her mother says. "Remember, you can't forget the champagne and orange juice this morning for the salon. And you may want to leave some time to pick up some glasses at the store. I can't remember if Joyce said that Jane had picked them up yet, and you know that we can't count on Max to remember. . . "

"Mom, mom, slow down. I just got up, give me a sec, okay?"

"Why did you sleep in the basement? And did you sleep in your clothes?"

"I got home late last night and just decided to crash downstairs and not wake anyone up."

Her mom looks at her out of the corner of her eye, as if she's trying to get a good read on the situation. Giving up, she simply says, "Well, you better get moving," and hands Nancy a cup of coffee, which she accepts gratefully.

As Nancy makes her way up the stairs and to the bathroom, she hears a final "And wake Mike up before you get in the shower." Sighing, she turns herself around and heads the opposite way down the hall to Mike's room. She knocks twice and enters. Mike is still sound asleep, arms and legs sprawled out of the sheets. He's over six feet tall, but he still looks like the gangly teenager that she remembers so clearly. She's amazed by the fact that Mike will be a husband by the end of the day.

"Hey Mike," she calls as she crosses the room to him. She sits down on the edge of his bed and shakes his shoulder.

"Nancy, leave me alone," he whines at her rolling over to face the wall.

"Well, if you don't get up soon, Mom will be in here and not me."

"Fine," he says rolling back over. "Is that coffee?"

“Yes,” she says grabbing the cup away from his grasping hand.

“Come on, it’s my wedding day.”

“Fine,” she says and relinquishes the steaming cup.

“So what time did you get home last night?” he asks before taking a sip.

“I don’t know, actually. I think after 1.”

“Did Jonathan come home with you?”

“God, what is it with all the questions this morning?”

“What? When we left last night, you were sobbing in his arms, Nancy. I’m just curious.”

She sighs—he does have a point. “Yes, he came home with me. We slept on the couch in the basement. He left about 10 minutes ago. Happy now?”

Mike nods as he takes another drink of the coffee. “Are you back together?”

“I don’t know,” she says, and Mike rolls his eyes. “I really don’t, Mike. We’re trying to sort out a lot, and the exact status of our relationship isn’t at the top of the list.”

“Fine, fine, don’t get upset. It’s just hard to know how to interact with him that’s all.”

“Mike, he’s about to become your brother-in-law, and he’s doing you a huge favor by being your photographer this weekend. Maybe you should just treat him like a friend. Would that be so hard?”

“Jesus, Nance, don’t be so touchy about it.”

She stands up then and flips him the finger as she walks about the door.

“By the way, you’re welcome for the coffee,” she shouts as she heads

to the bathroom.

She's ready and out the door, Holly in tow, by 10:00 a.m. and manages to make it to the salon just as Max is arriving. The three of them set up the food and drink, managing to finish moments before Jane and Joyce arrive. While Jane hasn't been demanding about the wedding at all, Nancy and Max want to give her a memorable morning. The look on Jane's face when she walks in the door and sees the spread of food and decorations in the salon is enough to let them know that they succeeded. They spend the morning getting manicures and pedicures and having their hair styled. Joyce rarely participates in such rituals, and Nancy loves watching her indulge herself.

After about an hour at the salon, Jonathan walks in, camera around his neck. He's greeted by a round of applause and hellos.

"Mind if I get a few photos?" he asks Jane.

"Of course," his sister says, smiling. "Grab a glass of champagne, too. We have plenty."

"Maybe when I'm done," he says, returning Jane's smile.

Nancy is out his line of sight getting her nails painted when he arrives, and she doesn't greet him, opting to watch him for a few moments instead. He looks much better than he did yesterday morning, well rested and, well, happy. He's not dressed for the wedding yet, wearing a fitted pair of jeans and a plaid shirt, and his hair is as floppy as ever. She smiles as she watches him interact with everyone and settle himself into his work.

While documenting his sister's wedding might not be the level of work he normally performs, you can tell just by looking at him how seriously he takes the job, and she knows it's because he wants Jane and Mike to remember every second of this weekend. She's always loved watching him work, whether it be in the field or in the dark room. Where he's normally shy and, sometimes, a bit awkward, he's confident and graceful when it comes to photography. And there's a level of intensity about him in these moments that can be

intimidating, no matter how well you know him (and which she finds incredibly attractive).

As Nancy watches him, she finally puts her finger on that quality about him that she noticed Wednesday night at the diner. Jonathan has always been more comfortable on the edge of events, observing and documenting. In high school and even college, he almost tried to make himself invisible, to shrink into the shadows unless he was pulled out by her or his family. But now, he's still on the edge, but he no longer seems to be hiding, filling the space instead with his presence and using it to his advantage. He still manages to be discrete, but he's deliberate in his actions in a way he never was before. And it's amazing to watch.

Once her nails are done, she walks across the salon to grab a glass of champagne. As she pours, she hears a click and looks up and straight into his lens.

"No fair," she says. "I didn't know you were taking my picture."

"Those make the best photos," he says, gently letting go of his camera to hang on the strap around his neck.

He walks over and pours himself a glass as well and leans back on the table next to her.

"Hey," he says, lifting his glass to her.

"Hey, yourself," she says returning the gesture.

"How are you doing?" he asks.

"Aside from being grilled by my mother and Mike this morning, I'm good."

"Hop was waiting for me when I got home," he says. "I couldn't get in the house until I gave him a full account of my whereabouts."

"I guess it was good that we decided not to hide ourselves in my parent's basement today, huh."

"Yeah, probably. But it would have been a lot more fun," he says

with a wink as he downs his champagne and leaves to take photos of Jane and Joyce getting their nails done together. Nancy can feel a blush slowly start to make its way up neck and face, so she quickly turns to busy herself cleaning up the table.

The rest of the day flies by in a blur. Getting dressed the Byers' house—it's the first time Nancy has been there in years, and it still feels like more of a home to her than anywhere else in the world—driving to the gym in Hopper's big old Bronco, waiting for the guests to arrive, and, then, the ceremony itself. The look on her brother's face when he first sees Jane on Hopper's arm walking down the aisle leaves Nancy speechless. She looks to see if Jonathan has captured the moment, and she's relieved to find his camera pointed in Mike's direction before swinging back to Hopper and Jane as they walk together. He briefly moves the camera away from his eye and looks her way. She offers him a shy smile, which he returns before getting back to work.

She tries her best to pay attention to the rest of the ceremony, but she can't help but track Jonathan's every move. She feels almost tethered to him by some invisible line. She can feel him when he's behind her and knows when he moves to another part of the room. Like him, she has no idea what exactly is happening between them. The entire weekend has been an emotional roller coaster, moving from awkwardness to friendliness to anger to lust back to anger and then to sadness and acceptance. For her, she's accepted the fact that she still loves him without any promise of reciprocation. For him, she's not quite sure yet, but there's clearly been movement of some sort. She finds herself getting lost in thought about what exactly that movement may bring and not paying attention to what's happening around her until she hears Max whisper, "Nancy, it's your turn," when it's time for her to walk down the aisle.

She spends the majority of the night with Holly, helping her with dinner and making sure she knows where the needs to be for all of the photos and other bridal party requirements. And once the music starts, Holly pulls her out on to the dance floor as her dedicated partner for the evening. Nancy's not sure who the DJ is or who chose the music, but it's an amazing mix of songs from their childhood and beyond, moving with ease between 70s, 80s, and 90s hits. Everyone

is out on the dance floor, including Hopper. Not surprisingly, Lucas is impressing everyone with his dance moves, while Dustin provides well timed comic relief. Nancy has continued to keep her eye on Jonathan all night, but it's gotten harder once the lights went down and the dancing began.

"Lips Like Sugar," one of Nancy's favorite songs from college comes on, and she immediately looks for Jonathan. He hated this song as much as she loved it, and he never failed to tease her mercilessly about the nonsensical lyrics. She finally spots him on the edge of the dance floor talking with Jane, who is clearly telling him that he no longer needs to take pictures. She can tell he's protesting, but Jane eventually grabs the camera from around his neck and hands it over to Joyce.

"Holly," Nancy calls to her sister. "Why don't you go see if you can get Jonathan to dance," she says pointing her to where he now stands with his hands in his pockets.

"Sure," Holly replies and runs over to Jonathan and, somehow, manages to drag him out onto the dance floor. Nancy tries her best not to pay too much attention to them as they make their way over to her, dancing with Max and Jane's friends as a distraction. Nancy doesn't know how her sister convinced him to do it, but Jonathan is now full on dancing with Holly to the song, spinning her and pulling out moves she never knew he possessed. He looks over to her and flashes a wicked smile. She quickly turns away to figure out her next move, but then she suddenly feels familiar hands on her hips pulling her close until she lands gently against his chest. Jonathan leans down and places his lips at her ear, quietly singing along with the song:

Lips like sugar, sugar kisses

Lips like sugar, sugar kisses

A chill runs straight up her spine, and her entire body breaks out into goose pimples. She's so close to him that she can feel him laugh once he notices the effect he's having on her. Her spins her around and pulls her in closer, swaying with her to the beat.

"When did you start to like dancing, Jonathan?" she asks, lifting

herself to place her cheek on his so that he can hear her.

“Who says I like this?” he says and looks down at her with a smirk. He leans into her and follows with, “You know I’ve never liked Echo and The Bunnymen.”

She laughs at that and twirls herself away from him, but he won’t let go of her hand completely, pulling her back into his chest. And just as the song comes to an end, Jonathan brings his mouth back to her ear once again.

“I took the job in Chicago,” he whispers.

Nancy stops dancing. “What?” she asks a bit too loudly.

“I called the *Tribune* today and accepted the job. I start next month.”

Nancy pulls back to look at him then, and she’s greeted with one of Jonathan’s signature crooked grins.

“Next month?” she asks. He nods in response. Nancy crashes into him then, wrapping her arms around his neck and kissing him full on the lips. He returns the kiss just as passionately, cupping her face the way she loves. Hooting and hollering suddenly erupts around them. They break apart to see their friends and family cheering. Steve calls out “It’s about damn time!” and the proclamation is followed by a round of applause.

Jonathan grabs her hand then and quickly walks them off of the dance floor straight to the nearest exit.

They find some privacy down a dark hallway around the corner from the gym’s entrance and indulge in the most ridiculous make-out session she’s ever experienced—his hands are up her skirt, and hers are down his pants all the while surrounded by motivational quotes for junior high kids: Dreams Don’t Work Unless You Do, Your Attitude Determines Your Direction, You are Capable of Amazing Things. It’s magical. And just before she’s about to remove his pants completely, Jonathan finally comes to his senses.

“Nancy?”

“Hmmm?” she says, too lost in sucking on this particularly soft spot next to his collar bone to answer.

“Do you think we should stop?”

“God no,” she stays without removing her lips from his chest.

“Nance, I want this, god, do I want this, but don’t you think we might enjoy it more somewhere more private?”

She stops then, silently acknowledging his point. And they both erupt into laughter at the ridiculousness of the situation. They step apart to pull themselves together—she helps him straighten his shirt and tie, he arranges the straps of her dress, but they never take their hands completely off of the other.

“When did you decide?” she asks as she leans up to help settle his hair.

“I think I’ve always known I’d take it,” he says, playing with the strap of her dress. “I don’t think I could stay away from you any longer, even if we weren’t together. But I made up my mind last night.”

“When?”

“The minute you agreed to dance with me.”

She stops messing with his unruly hair and refocuses her attention back to his eyes. She sees that look again, the one he originally revealed to her at his mom’s wedding to Hopper, and she can’t stop the tears from falling.

“Nancy, don’t cry,” he says, wiping her cheek.

“I’m sorry, I can’t help it,” she says. “I didn’t think I’d ever be back here with you like this. It’s all happened so fast, and I’m just a bit overwhelmed.”

“Ah, Nance, you’ve never been someone to not finish what you started,” he says and kisses her gently on the lips. “It’s one of the things I love most about you.”

After she's stops herself from crying (again) and they finally look presentable, they make their way, hand-in-hand, back into the gym. The dance floor is filled to the brim, and it's a pretty amazing sight. They head over to the bar to get themselves a drink, but, before they can order, the initial strums of "Should I Stay or Should I Go" start to play. Jonathan stops in his tracks and turns to the dance floor. There, at the edge, is Will, looking straight at him with a huge grin on his face. Jonathan looks down at her with an identical grin. She nods her head, and he runs over to his little brother and picks him up, easily carrying him to the center of the dance floor despite the fact that Will is now taller than he is. Nancy runs to keep up.

By the time she reaches them, the song is in full swing, and Jonathan and Will are jumping and singing to each other, banging their heads to the beat. She's seen this sight before—this song is a connection between these brothers that literally extends beyond dimensions and life or death—but it's been years. Slowly, members of The Party make their way to the edge of the scene, smiling at the sight before them. By the time the chorus has come on, the entire group is jumping together and singing at the top of their lungs, including Nancy.

Jonathan turns his attention to her at the start of the third verse, laser focused:

*This Indecision's Bugging Me
If You Don't Want Me Set Me free.
Exactly Whom I'm Supposed to Be
Don't you know which clothes even fit me?
Come on and let me know
Should I cool it or should I blow?*

She jumps into his arms at the end of the verse, and he carries her into the middle of the group. When he lets her go, Will immediately picks her up, spins her once, and gives her a giant kiss on the cheek. "It's nice to have you back, Nancy," he says and turns to dance with Mike and Jane. Nancy stops for a moment and looks around to find that Hopper and Joyce have joined in the fun. She's now at the center of Jonathan's family once again, only this time two Wheelers are added to the mix. The sight before her overwhelms her with joy, but she doesn't cry—she dances and sings and embraces those she loves instead.

“Ouch, Nancy, your heels!”

“Sorry. I can’t see where I’m going.”

“Well, that was my foot, and this is my hand,” Jonathan says shoving his hand into her face before clasping the free hand she’s extended in search of him.

“Shut up, smart ass.”

“Make me,” he says invitingly.

“I will,” she responds just as coyly, followed by terse, “If you can find your room.”

He grunts at that and slowly winds them through the brush along the back side of the Byers house. Jonathan had somehow forgotten his house key that morning, and the rest of the family is still at the wedding. So here they are, trying to sneak into his bedroom through the window. She hopes they can get in and have some time alone before the rest of the family makes it back home.

“Shit,” Jonathan curses from in front of her.

“What?”

“Hop must have gotten new windows—there’s a screen here that never used to be.”

“Does it move?”

“I’ll try,” he says and reaches up to push the screen. “It’s not going anywhere. I think it’s locked from the inside.”

“Try this,” she says handing him one of her heels.

“For what?”

“If that heel hurt so much, maybe it’s sharp enough to break through the screen.”

"I've missed you, Nancy Wheeler," Jonathan says grabbing the shoe and giving her a quick kiss.

He makes quick use of the heel, breaking a hole in the screen that's large enough for him to slip his fingers through. He then continues to rip the screen just enough so that a person can fit through to reach the window inside.

"Do you think Hop will be pissed about the screen?" Nancy asks.

"Yep. But I really don't care. The payoff will be worth it," he says, turning back to her with his crooked grin. "Now, I'm going to lift you up so that you can reach the window. I think you'll have more leverage than me if I hold you up."

"Are you sure?"

"Yep. You ready?"

"As I'll ever be," she says. Jonathan stands behind her and lifts her by the waist and hoists her level with the window. She slips her arms through ripped screen and finds the edge of the window frame and pushes up. The window slides open easily.

"Bingo!" she calls back to him.

"Okay, now crawl on through. And when you're in, get rid of the screen so I can get in."

Nancy lifts herself up and through the screen, careful not to snag her dress, and the window, swinging her legs over to land gently on the floor of Jonathan's old bedroom. She turns and unlocks the screen and pops it out of the frame. As she waits for him to maneuver himself into the room, she takes a moment to look around. It's nothing like it was when Jonathan lived here. Jane moved into the room once he went to college, and Joyce must have redecorated again since then. The music and movie posters are gone, as are the shelves of albums and cassettes, replaced by family photos and pastel curtains and artwork.

Jonathan slips in behind her and closes the window.

“Wow. I can’t believe this is your old room?”

“Right? Mom went a little crazy with the pastels, don’t you think?”

“Yeah,” Nancy says laughing. “Maybe it was the years of The Evil Dead posters and plaid everything that did her in?”

He laughs at that and pulls her into him, wrapping his arms around her waist and nuzzling her neck. “I wonder if everything has changed,” he whispers and walks them over to the bed. When her legs touch the mattress, he lowers them down so that he’s lying on top of her, and the mattress groans in response to their weight.

“It’s the same old mattress,” he says as loud squeaks follow every move they makes. “We better be quick or we’ll keep the whole house up,” he says as he trails kisses down her neck and onto her chest.

“Shut up,” Nancy groans. “We’re old pros at being quiet on this thing.”

He stops to look at her then, placing his arms on either side of her head. He doesn’t say anything, just smiles down at her.

“So no one will walk in on us, tonight, will they?” she asks.

“No. Will is staying in his old room, Jane and Mike are at the hotel. The room’s mine tonight.”

She smiles and settles herself underneath him.

Jonathan’s expression suddenly turns serious. “I forgot to tell you something earlier. Something important.”

Nancy furrows her brow, worried that this reconciliation was too easy, too quick. Is another shoe about to drop?

After what seems like an age, he drops his forehead to hers and says, “I love you, Nancy. I never stopped loving you.”

She feels a slight shift in her chest at his words, as if a small piece of her heart has settled back into place.

He kisses her then, gently brushing his tongue against her bottom lip. She opens her mouth with a sigh, and when their tongues meet, a jolt of electricity shoots directly to her core. She can feel him growing hard—he clearly felt the same current—and presses her pelvis up into his. Jonathan groans, which only increases the intensity of what she feels. She longs to wrap her legs around him and give into their desire, but he slows their kissing, setting a deliberate pace. As they undress, they take their time to reacquaint themselves with each body part and expanse of skin, almost as if they are reclaiming the other as their own. And when they finally come together, Nancy feels complete for the first time in years. She relishes in the feel of him moving inside of her, commits the feel of his back, arms, chest, lips to memory, noticing the slight differences that have come with age. She whispers his name over and over again, until they both lose themselves in the other. They fall asleep where they lie, still tangled together in the sheets

When she wakes in the morning, Jonathan is sleeping on his stomach beside her, his arm draped across her chest. Seeking his warmth, she scoots herself even closer to him and lets her mind drift, allowing herself to think of the future beyond med school, one with Jonathan firmly placed within it.

“I can hear you thinking, Nancy.”

“I’m sorry.”

“S’okay. It’s is a good way to wake up,” he says turning his head to her and giving her a half-hearted kiss.

She laughs.

“What are you thinking about?”

“Everything and nothing.”

“Thanks for that clarification,” he says and grins as she playfully swats at this head.

“Are you thinking about what happens next?”

“Yeah.”

“Me too,” he says.

“When you are heading back to New York.”

“I leave on Tuesday. Why?”

“Want to visit Chicago?”

“Really?” he asks fully opening his eyes.

She nods. “I don’t work tomorrow, and I can call in sick on Tuesday, drive you to Indy for your flight.”

“Really?” he asks again.

“Really, Jonathan.”

“I’d love to.”

“Your family won’t mind?”

“Nah, besides I don’t care if they do.”

“Jonathan . . .”

“What? You’re as important to me as my family. Maybe even more so.”

She lets his words settle for a minute before leaning in and kissing him.

“I love you,” she whispers.

“I love you too,” he says, pulling himself on top of her to deepen their kiss and attempting to avoid their final family obligations as long as possible.

“Nancy,” Jonathan whispers, “We should get up.”

“Then get up,” she says, nibbling his bottom lip.

“You’re not going to make this easy, are you?”

“When do I ever make things easy, Jonathan?”

He laughs at that and gives her one final kiss, making sure that she's left breathless when they finally part. He gets out of bed and stretches, and she enjoys the view of his strong back and thin hips and thinks of how they felt as she wrapped herself around him last night. He turns and offers her his hand.

“What?” he asks grinning.

“Nothing,” she says innocently, taking his hand and lifting herself out of bed. “What time do we need to be at my parent's house for brunch?”

Jonathan leans down to read the clock on the nightstand. “About 10 minutes ago.”

“Shit,” she replies.

“Don't worry, Nance. They don't really need us today. Besides, better late than never.”

“Good point,” she says, leaning in for one more kiss.

5. Epilogue

Notes for the Chapter:

I had planned to post this chapter a bit earlier, but life simply got in the way. Looking back at this fic, I really went all in on the fluff. It's been a tough winter, so I think I let myself give into to my fluffier Jancy instincts. This final chapter follows suit, but I can't help but let them be happy in the end (they deserve it).

Thanks to everyone who's read and left comments on the story--I truly appreciate it.

She's late.

Nancy hadn't even thought about her period until her friend and colleague, Diane, started talking about how bad her cramps were that day. And then she panicked—When was her last period? Shouldn't she have started by now?—and ran out of the room and straight to the hospital's lab. She waited for the women's bathroom to open up and then dove into the small room, grabbing one of the small plastic cups that's always waiting on a table in the corner.

She has to force herself to pee, tricking her mind by turning the faucet on full blast. She then hurries out of the room, cup in hand, and marches immediately over to the lab tech, Gary.

"Hey, Nancy, what can we do for you tonight?" he says in greeting.

"I need you to test this right now," she says in her most authoritative voice as she places the cup in the small opening of the window dividing the lab from the waiting area.

"Okay. The standard tests?"

She nods.

"It's late, and I'm pretty backed up. Can it wait a few hours?"

"I need to know right away," she says looking Gary straight in the eye, trying to make herself as intimidating as she knows she can be.

"Okay then," Gary says looking at her strangely as he takes the cup from her hands.

Nancy takes a seat one of the small couches in the lab's waiting room. She picks up *Newsweek* and tries to focus on a story about the midterm elections, but it's impossible. She's too distracted by the fact that she may very well be on her way to becoming a parent. If she is pregnant, she can't be too far along. She's had no symptoms to speak of. What if she is? She takes a deep breath and tries to focus on the emotions that are coursing through her body. Is she excited? Nervous? Disappointed? Scared? Happy?

"Hey Nancy," Gary calls back suddenly, breaking her out of her thoughts. She hops up immediately and nearly runs to the window.

"Congratulations," Gary says with a big smile on his face.

"What?"

"Congratulations, Nancy. You're pregnant."

"How did you know the test was for me?" she asks quietly.

"Well, no one looks that anxious about a patient's urine sample."

"How do I look now?"

"Happy," he says, his grin widening.

"What?"

"Nancy, you look happy. You've been smiling since the moment I told you that you were pregnant."

She hadn't even realized she had been smiling. She reaches up to feel her mouth and cheeks and finds the dimples that always accompany her smile. She starts to laugh then. And cry. She's pregnant, and she can't wait to tell Jonathan.

It's been a year since Jonathan had moved to Chicago, and they've taken their relationship pretty slow. He found his own place in Andersonville, and she kept her apartment in Evanston. They went on dates. They explored the city together. They found their favorite spots to have brunch, listen to music, or just hang out. They got to know each other again, and they were both amazed by how easy it was to fall back into their relationship. Years had passed, yes, but their feelings were just as strong as ever. Two months ago they decided it was time for them to move back in together. They found a great apartment in Lakeview—an el ride away from both of their jobs—and they're still in the process of unpacking their boxes and getting settled, which gives Nancy the perfect way to spring the news on him.

Jonathan is asleep on the couch when she gets home, book on his face. He must have been waiting up for her, but he clearly failed. She smiles as she watches him sleep soundly, one hand still on the book, the other dangling off the side of the couch. He looks so young like this, and her stomach fills with butterflies as she thinks about how he'll react when she tells him the news.

She sits down on the couch next to him, still in her scrubs, and gently removes the book from his face. She then kisses him softly on the cheek, which is rough with a day's worth of stubble.

"Jonathan . . . Jonathan, wake up. I need to ask you a question."

"Nance?" he asks as his eyes slowly open. "What time is it?"

"Almost midnight. You fell asleep."

"Did you just get home?" he asks, rubbing his hands over his face as he tries to wake up.

"Yeah, just a second ago. I need to ask you a question."

"Now?"

"Yeah. It's important, I swear."

He nods, but looks at her skeptically. She normally heads straight to bed after her shift at the hospital, exhausted from 12 hours on her feet.

“What color do you think we need to paint the spare room? Yellow, blue, or pink?” she asks.

“Nancy, can’t this wait? I don’t care about paint colors right now,” he whines at her.

“I’m serious, Jonathan. This is an important question.”

“Oh come on, paint colors can’t really be that important . . .” he starts and then quickly stops. “What colors did you say again?”

“Yellow, blue, or pink,” she responds, as nonchalantly as she can manage. “I prefer yellow myself.”

He sits up then, his confused look slowly being replaced by one of shock.

“I’ve always preferred nurseries that were gender neutral,” she says quietly.

“Nancy?” he asks, taking her hand in his.

“Hmmm?”

“How?”

“Seriously, Jonathan, please tell me I don’t have to explain basic biology to you,” she says trying but failing to lighten the mood.

“Nancy, come on. You’re on the pill? We’ve been careful.”

“But the pill isn’t 100 percent effective, and there was that one night when we couldn’t wait to get into the apartment and so we took advantage of the backseat of your car . . .”

“Wow.”

“Wow what? Wow, we were stupid? Or wow, this is great news.”

“Maybe a bit of both. I’m leaning toward the latter.”

“Really?” she asks.

“Really,” he says. She lets out the breath she didn’t realize she’d been holding.

She turns to face him then, and he’s looking at her with wonder in his eyes. “We’re going to be parents?” he asks quietly, then followed by a more resolute statement, “We’re going to be parents.”

She nods.

“I’m scared to death,” he says as he slowly starts to grin.

“Me, too,” she says mirroring his excitement.